

ANNE GILCHRIST  
AND WALT WHITMAN

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# ANNE GILCHRIST AND WALT WHITMAN

BY  
ELIZABETH PORTER GOULD

Author of  
"GEMS FROM WALT WHITMAN"

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## Anne Gilchrist and Walt Whitman

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When, in England, in June, 1869, Madox Brown put into the hands of Anne Gilchrist Mr. William Michael Rossetti's *Selections from Walt Whitman*, he little dreamed of the result.

Mrs. Gilchrist, having heard nothing but ill-words of the poems, opened the book with feelings "partly of indifference, partly of antagonism." But as she read . . . . .

"The Soul!

Forever and forever—longer than soil is brown and solid—  
longer than water ebbs and flows."

"Each of us inevitable;

Each of us limitless—each of us with his or her right upon  
the earth,

Each of us allowed the eternal purports of the earth,"

and other selections in the book, she became conscious of a new and most powerful influence affecting her.

"I can read no other book," she wrote Rossetti a fortnight later. "It holds me entirely spell-bound, and I go through it again and again with deepening delight and wonder."

This new, and, he confessed, unexpected link in their friendship so pleased Rossetti that he begged to loan her his own complete copy of the poems; also a letter the poet had written him concerning his *Selections*, in which he offered his friendship. ("Permit me to offer you my friendship.") Anyone like her, he said, who so valued that "glorious man Whitman, one day to be known as one of the greatest sons of Earth," ought to read the whole of him. Considered abstractly and as a whole, the sound of the entire book was to him "like a portentous roll of chorus, such as the 'The Lord God Omnipotent Reigneth,' in Handel." In a manly way he referred to the doubtful passages in the poems. This she fully understood, for, on accepting the gift, she wrote she was certain that that "great and divinely beautiful nature could not infuse any poison into the wine he had poured out for them." She somewhat distrusted her powers, however, as a critic, being averse to criticism; but "what I like," she wrote, "I grasp firmly and silently; what I do not like, I prefer to let go silently too."

After a still further reading, she wrote again, "I had not dreamed that words could cease to be words and become electric streams like these. I do assure you that, strong as I am, I feel sometimes as if I had not bodily strength to read many of these poems. In some of them there is such a weight of emotion, such a tension of the heart,

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that mine refuses to beat under it—stands quite still—and I am obliged to lay the book down for a while ; . . . then there is such calm wisdom and strength of thought, such a cheerful breadth of sunshine, that the soul bathes in them, renewed and strengthened. Living impulses flow out of these that make me exult in life, and yet look longingly towards the ‘superb vistas of Death.’” (*Song at Sunset.*)

If the poems did not seem to her equal in power and beauty, she felt they were “vital ;” that “they grew, they were not made.” She compared it all to the growth of a forest rather than the making of a palace or cathedral. “Are not the hitherto accepted masterpieces of literature akin rather to noble architecture ?” she asked. She so felt the intense humanity of this “great-souled American,” that she cried out with the poet himself, at the close of his book,

“Camerado, this is no book.

Who touches this, touches a man !” (*So Long.*)

The long, interesting letters, born of this new experience, became a signal proof to Rossetti that the friendship which united them was a “matter of essence, and not merely of circumstances.” Her “resplendent enthusiasm” charmed him. “It is,” he wrote, “the earnest of the boundless enthusiasm Walt Whitman will one day excite, and continue



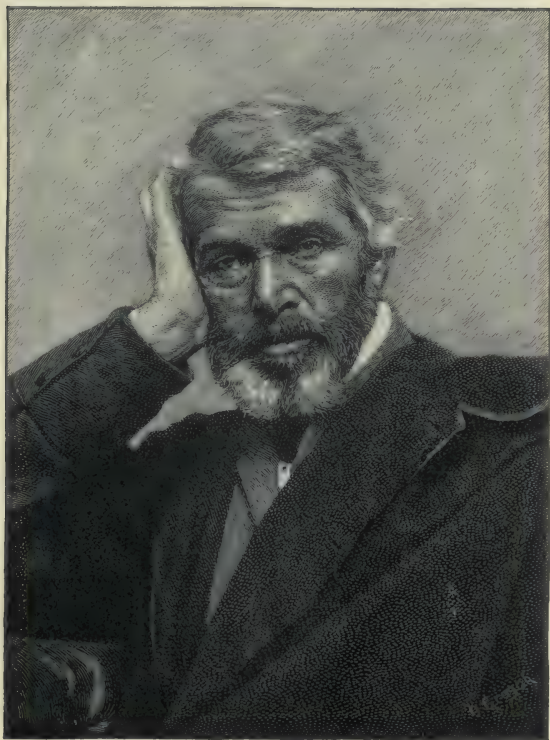
exciting for ages." He confessed he knew not where could be found a woman true-hearted and brave enough to express herself with "such decision and perfectness of perception" as she had done.

The acquaintance of Anne Gilchrist and William Michael Rossetti, had begun some nine years before, when her husband was writing his *Life of William Blake*. They, with four little children, were then living at 6 Cheyne Row, next door to Carlyle. He, as a well-equipped art-critic on the periodical press, and she, capable of furthering his development by sympathy and help, lifted their daily life to that plane which could make such gifted souls as William Michael and Dante Gabriel Rossetti feel at home. Living almost by themselves, they had attained a "twinship of nature," says one in a review of the *Life of Blake* (*N. A. Review* of October, 1864). Encouraged by her husband, Anne had already written some short articles; one on "Electricity" (for *Once a Week*), "A Glance at the Vegetable Kingdom," and "Whales and Whalemen" (for *Chambers' Magazine*). Her first article, "Our Nearest Relation," published in 1859, had attracted the notice of Dickens, who showed it to the Carlyles. (The *Academy* of December 5, 1885, in notice of her death.) Though her school-life came to an end at sixteen, she had continued a general study, music

being a specialty. The death, in her nineteenth year, of her only brother, to whom she was devoted, had aroused her whole being with questions she could not answer. Her depth of nature was irritated with the commonplace platitudes of friends, who, to her mind, attached too much importance to creeds and doctrines. "They are mere definitions after all," she cried. It seemed to her a very considerable thing just to believe in God, "the greatest thing allowed to mankind." She struggled against limitations of all kinds, even daring to say, on hearing of the confirmation of a friend, that if she were forced to be confirmed she would have to submit, but she trusted she should escape. All this intellectual struggle she finally silenced in aiming, as she said, to "fulfill the ends for which we were created; that is to say, develop to the utmost the nature which God has given us." In this light she lived a growing life with her widowed mother, studying books and people. She found the writings of the Transcendentalists, such as Emerson, a "sort of balance to her usual studies in Comte." She felt the next generation would call Emerson a great man, though his writings were then treated with a "good deal of contempt and ridicule." She gloried in Eclecticism. "Truth," she said, "is to be found complete in no man's system, but a portion of it in all systems." Lighter works claimed her attention. She felt that Maria

Edgeworth gave "fine deeds and fine talk, but never a human being ; she was evidently one who observed acutely, but neither thought nor felt deeply," while the "truthful simplicity and earnestness of feeling made Miss Bremer a beautiful painter of domestic life." All this Anne was feeling and saying at twenty years of age, when there came into her life the absorbing love of Alexander Gilchrist, one who could "fulfill her aspirations, realize her ideal of a true marriage, be a friend and helper as well as lover." She did not know how to describe him to her intimate friends, on announcing her engagement, except by telling them that he was "altogether, both in intellect and heart, great, noble and beautiful." Sweet pictures are given us of the happy days after the marriage, three years later, in 1851 (February 4th), when they went to York to collect materials for the *Life of Etty* the husband was writing ; also at Lyme Regis, within sight and sound of the sea, when "daily writing and reading, daily music and daily walks " were theirs—crowned by happy evenings, when he read aloud earnest books, while she worked with the needle, or "read" music, playing and singing all that he selected for her. In this life the first child, Percy, was born. The second, Beatrice, came to them when they were living their few secluded years at Guildford. That the *Life of Blake*, on which Mr. Gilchrist was engaged, might be better





THOMAS CARLYLE.



done, they decided to settle in London, where Blake's "Illustrations of the Book of Job" had inspired him. Writing to Carlyle, to whom he had become of real assistance in obtaining prints of portraits and costumes for the *Frederick* he was then writing, the young husband asked his advice as to a house there. The sage of Chelsea replied that he did not "dare advise anybody into a house (almost as dangerous as advising him to a wife, except that divorce is easier), but, if heaven should please to rain him accidentally into the house next door he should esteem it a kindness. Thus it happened that, in 1856, the Gilchrists settled at 6 Cheyne Row, where they lived for six years. There were born their two other children, Herbert and Grace; and there, as has been said, began the friendship of William Michael Rossetti. He found in both of them a "large fund of intelligence and sympathy, and, in neither, the least pretence or affectation. A more evidently well-assorted couple there could hardly be." He was observant of their friendly relations with the Carlyles. Anne would relieve her cares by having a chat with "lively" Jane, who possessed a "charming audacity and winning gaiety of manner." In many little ways each helped the other. Jane looked up to Anne as a fine housekeeper. As Carlyle thought Anne made the best bread, Jane took lessons of her. Not proving an apt pupil, she asked her one day



“to stand over her” while she made it herself. “A precious bother I am, to be sure, to you,” said Jane, “but if I can never reward you on earth you are pretty certain to have two little additional wings for it in heaven!”

In this daily life as neighbors, the Gilchrists saw much of the strength as well as weakness of Carlyle. Jane told them one day that he never complained of serious things, but if his finger was cut “the house turned upside down; one must hold it, and another get plaster,” etc. At this time he was engaged in writing his *Frederick*. In his pauses from work he enjoyed hearing Anne’s music. He became interested in Mr. Gilchrist’s *Life of Blake* all the more because he possessed the “Job Illustrations.” It was through a letter he had written Mr. Gilchrist on the appearance of his *Life of Etty* that the acquaintance was begun. He had then declared that the book was done in a “vigorous, sympathetic, vivacious spirit, promising the delineation actual and intelligible of a man extremely worth knowing,” while their reading of his *Life of Sterling* had led them to feel that “surely never before was there in any man the union of such Titan strength and keenest insight, with soft, tenderest, pitying gentleness. Never surely a man who had so the power of winning deep, reverent heart’s love from his readers.” They felt that his interpretation of Giotto’s portrait of Dante in

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*Hero Worship* might stand word for word as a description of himself.

One day Anne asked Jane what she thought her husband's best work. "*The French Revolution*," she replied, "was her favorite, though perhaps *Cromwell* was the best-written book." Carlyle himself once said to Mr. Gilchrist that if he were on his death-bed, the only thing he had done to give him any pleasure was the *Cromwell*, for it "dispersed the lies," and revealed him as "all men would some day see him to have been."

The sympathy of the Carlyles was very helpful to the Gilchrists in the bitter days when scarlet fever held the lives of their children, and, letting go of them, seized the husband to a fatal result. He was only thirty-three years of age (born 1828)—just the age of Anne. He was full of plans for work, a life of Wordsworth and others being in mind. All efforts for her to remain as a neighbor, after the last sad ministries were over, proved unavailing. She could not stay where life had been so full of blessing. She finally found a little old-fashioned, tile-roofed cottage in Shottermill, a quaint Hampshire village a mile from Haslemere, once a coaching town *en route* for Portsmouth and London. Here on the summit of a steep little Surrey hill, at the base of which flowed a brook, Anne Gilchrist and her children were settled three months after her husband's death. Her heart

turned more and more to her children. This mother-love Jane Carlyle expressed more forcibly than elegantly the day the family left her neighborhood, when she said to a friend, who told it, "Mrs. Gilchrist would skin and bury herself alive for the benefit of her children."

Here among the Surrey hills Anne Gilchrist took up life again, not, as she said, *in* the presence of the one with whom she had lived eleven such full years, but *with* the presence. "Alec's spirit is with me ever," she wrote; "presides in my home, speaks to me in every sweet scene; broods over the peaceful valley; haunts the grand, wild hill-tops; shines gloriously forth in setting sun and moon and stars." When sad memories almost crushed her, she thanked God for hard work, that, like harness to an overtired horse, kept her up. She began at once to finish the *Life of Blake*, when her friends, the Rossettis, proved friends indeed. They had been deeply impressed with her "strong sense—common sense and mental acumen combined"—revealed under her deep sorrow, also with her aim to make the home a "centre of mental as well as family vital energy."

At last, in 1863, with their help, the *Life of Blake*, that "beloved task which had kept her head above water in the deep sea of affliction," was finished. Carlyle, Browning and others sent words of appreciation on its publication.



Later, she wrote an article for *Macmillan's Magazine* on "The Indestructibility of Force." But that, she said, should be her last attempt for many a day. She decided to devote herself wholly to her children. "After all," she wrote, "they will not always be children; and if I have it in me to do anything worth doing with my pen, why, I can do it ten years hence, when I shall have completed my task so far as direct instruction of the children goes. I shall only be forty-six then, not in my dotage." She was convinced that a divided aim was not only "most harassing to a conscientious disposition, but quite fatal to success—to doing one's very best in either."

In this belief she filled her days with some teaching, considerable reading, a little music she "could not do without," attention to an aged, sick mother, and devotion to her children. She lived a tranquil, sequestered mode of life "with much solitude and no luxury in it." In this she was a "fanatical believer." Her great recreation was her "glorious walks" across the breezy heaths, and into the deep lanes of Guildford and Haslemere.

"If I go out feeling ever so jaded, irritable, dispirited," she said, "when I find myself up there alone (for unless I have perfect stillness and quietness, and my thoughts are as free as a bird, the walk does not seem to do me good), care and fatigue are all shaken off, and life seems as grand and

sweet and noble a thing as the scene my bodily eyes rest on—and if sad thoughts come, they have hope and sweetness so blended with them that I hardly know them to be sad—and I return to my little chicks quite bright and rested, and fully alive to the fact that they are the sweetest, loveliest chicks in the whole world ;—and ‘ Giddy ’ (Grace) says, ‘ mamma has shut up her box of sighs.’ ”

Mrs. Gilchrist felt there was no finer country for her walks than this region of Shottermill with its breezy uplands, its pine-clad hills, its undulating lands over which grew the purple heather. She walked with an even, light step, while every aspect of Nature was assimilated. She was one of Nature’s own daughters, to whom she opened her soul.

Besides this companionship, Anne was rich in her friends. Both Dante Gabriel and William Michael Rossetti were frequent visitors. When they brought to her home their sister Christina, she thoroughly enjoyed the “unaffected simplicity and gentleness, kindness to the children,” which her visits revealed. It was while she was sitting under the yew-tree in this Brookbank home, one September day in 1866, that the card of Mr. Alfred Tennyson was put into her hands. He had come with his wife to see a place, about to be sold, concerning which they had corresponded. While she was preparing to accompany them to the estate,

Tennyson amused himself with her seven year old Grace, as she sat on his knee. Afterwards, when they were walking up a hill together, Tennyson said to Mrs. Gilchrist, "I admire that little girl of yours. How many children have you?"

"Four," she replied, upon which he answered hastily, "Quite enough, Quite enough"—much to the amusement of the mother.

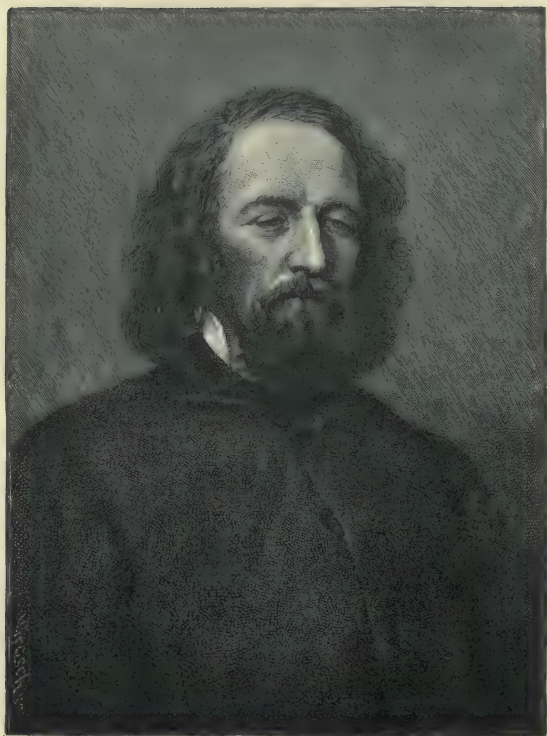
In referring to this walk with Tennyson, Mrs. Gilchrist said she felt singularly happy and free from restraint in his presence—a sense of a "beneficent, generous, nobly humane nature being combined with his intellectual greatness." The son Herbert says that the children never forgot the poet, as, in his long dark cloak and big hat, his tall, gaunt figure "shuffled across the long, unequally-shaped drawing-room" to stand before Blake's water-color, "Elijah Mounted in the Fiery Chariot." "Every inch a king," the mother said in describing him, "features massive, eyes very grave and penetrating, hair long, still very dark, and though getting thin, falls in such a way as to give a peculiar beauty to the mystic head;" while Mrs. Tennyson seemed to her to be a "sweet, graceful woman with singularly winning gentle manners," but looking "painfully fragile and wan."

Both the poet and his wife appreciated the efforts of Mrs. Gilchrist in assisting them to buy a place in that vicinity. But ere settling permanently, they



decided to try the climate by living awhile at "Greysht." While Anne extended her help in furnishing the house, she entertained them two days in Brookbank. Upon their being settled in "Greysht," she occasionally dined with them. At one time, among the subjects freely discussed was the Queen's kindness to Tennyson. Her manner towards him, said Mrs. Tennyson, was "childlike and charming. They both gave their opinions freely." Anne never forgot a walk home one night with Tennyson when they discussed Spencer's *Nebular Hypothesis* and *Illogical Geology*, books she had just been reading. She said he "talked gloriously" of immortality as well as materialism. Referring to one of their Haslemere rambles, she said that though he was short-sighted, he was most observant. In order to see the tiny movement of a number of springs bubbling up through the sand to which she was calling his attention, he put his face almost to the water as he lay down near the edge of the brook.

It was through the agent Mrs. Gilchrist finally found for the Tennysons that "Green Hill," afterwards improved and called "Aldworth," was bought at a moderate price. "I do think," said Anne, after the purchase, "if ever there was a place made for a poet to live in, this is the spot—thirty-six acres, half-coppice above, three large fields and a little old farm-house below." She ever recalled



ALFRED TENNYSON.





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with delight Tennyson's feeling concerning it. "He was so pleased," she said, "a sort of childish glee that was beautiful to see, contrasting curiously enough with his saturnine moods." Again she noticed his excellent spirits the following year—1868—when occurred the laying of the cornerstone for the new house, with its inscription, "Prosper thou the work of our hands, O prosper thou our handiwork." After the ceremony, which included a few appropriate words of a friend, Mrs. Gilchrist seized a few moments, before post, to write Mrs. Tennyson. She knew she would have a special interest, for the change of name to *Aldworth* arose from the fact that some of her family came from a village of that name, where was a curious old church containing tombs of her Sellwood ancestors. (From Tennyson's *Memoirs*.)

When by the summer of the following year (1869) they were settled in the "very charming" new house, neighborly calls were made. Often, at the top of Blackdown, Tennyson would take his friends, sit on the heather and enjoy the sunset. Thus, on the site Mrs. Gilchrist, as Lady Tennyson said in her *Journal*, took such "endless trouble" to help obtain for them, the poet-laureate and his wife lived restful years, and there they both died. It was while living in this neighborhood, in "dear little Brookbank," that the poems of Walt Whitman came into Anne Gilchrist's life, the reading of

which was, as she said, "truly a new birth to her soul." "What more can you ask of the words of a man's mouth," she wrote Rossetti, "than that they should absorb into you as food and air, to appear again in your strength, gait, face—that they should be fibre and filter to your blood, joy and gladness to your whole nature?" She was persuaded that one great source of this "kindling, vitalizing power—the great source—was the grasp laid upon the present, the fearless and comprehensive dealing with reality." This "athlete full of rich words, full of joy, takes you by the hand and turns your face straight-forwards." She used to think it was great "to disregard happiness, to press on to a high goal careless, disdainful of it." Now she fully saw there was nothing so great as "to be capable of happiness;" to pluck it out "each moment and whatever happens;" to find that one can ride "as gay and buoyant on the angry, menacing, tumultuous waves of life, as on those that glide and glitter under a clear sky;" that it is not "defeat and wretchedness which come out of the storm of Adversity, but strength and calmness." As to the words he uses, she felt it was not mere delight they gave; *that* the sweet singers could give too in their degree; but they gave such life and health as enabled us "to pluck delights for ourselves out of every hour of the day, and taste the sunshine that ripened the corn in the crust we eat." She often

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seemed to herself to do that. She found a wonderful, inspiring comfort in the magnificent faith in, and love for, "sane and sacred death," who, in the language of this poet, came not as a terror, but as the "holiest minister of heaven."

"Rich, florid, loosener of the stricture-knot called life,  
Sweet, peaceful, welcome Death."—(*Death's Valley.*)

"Come lovely and soothing death.  
Undulate round the world, serenely arriving, arriving,  
In the day, in the night, to all, to each.  
Sooner or later, delicate death.

Praised be the fathomless universe,  
For life and joy, and for objects and knowledge curious,  
And for love, sweet love—but praise! praise! praise!  
For the sure-enwinding arms of cool-enfolding death."  
—(*Memories of Lincoln.*)

"At the last, tenderly,  
From the walls of the powerful fortified house,  
From the clasp of the knitted locks, from the keep of the  
well-closed doors,  
Let me be wafted.

"Let me glide noiselessly forth;  
With the key of softness unlock the locks—with a whisper,  
Set ope the doors O soul.

"Tenderly—be not impatient,  
(Strong is your hold, O mortal flesh,  
Strong is your hold, O love.)"

—(*The Last Invocation.*)

Then she exulted in a poet who, while thus welcoming death, could produce "evangel-poems



of comrades and of love," by which a "new and superb friendship" was made possible here. She felt with him the "Amplitude of Time," while "all, all was for immortality." She rejoiced in the modern man of which he sang—

"Of life immense in passion, pulse and power,  
Cheerful, for freest action formed under the laws divine.  
The Modern Man I sing."

For the first time she truly realized the meaning of Democracy—of individuality. As never before, she realized the glory of being a woman, of being a mother.

"I am the poet of the woman the same as of the man.  
And I say it is as great to be a woman as to be a man.  
And I say there is nothing greater than the mother of men."  
—(*Song of Myself*.)

Even for the prostitute she found him divinely tender and sympathetic, as in *The City Dead House*. I doubt if that poem will ever be more appreciated by any human being than by this woman who could write that inspired letter to Dante Gabriel Rossetti, on "Jenny," when his first volume of poems appeared in 1870—a poem which moved her to anguish, coming upon her "after she had been gazing into the very sanctuary of love where woman sat divinely enthroned."

"You touch Jenny gently—tenderly even," she wrote, "and I feel grateful to you for that; yet I

think even you are hard on her ; 'fond of guineas,' yes, for want is bitter, and it always dogs her steps, or, at any rate, lurks just round the corner. But 'fond of kisses,' no. I do not believe there is ever more any sweetness in a kiss for her, only, with whatever semblance it may be given or taken—an inward loathing."

Then with what impassioned eloquence (who can forget it?) she goes on to picture the heart, and circumstances leading to evil, of such a woman; from the first blind folly to the afterwards, with no human hand to help her up, perhaps pushed down from above by sisters, grasped from below by ever more and more brutalized men, her poor body dragged and dragged through the mire, even then, she says, "I do not believe its vileness stains through to her very inmost self. If I did, the pain would be more than I could bear; these tears would burn my cheeks like flame; I should hate my womanhood—crave annihilation for the race. No! God has not cursed men with the hideous power to wreck her soul as they can wreck her body. Poor soul! it was but half awake and alert to begin with—all its finest instincts yet undeveloped, else it would not have let her stand for a moment within the atmosphere of danger, but would have shed round her a subtle atmosphere banishing, dispelling danger! Now, crouched away back, with face averted from the mad riot of a body that

carries, but is scarce owned by it, numb with misery, and the utter privation of all healthful activity and sympathy, conscious of itself only through sullen despair, it waits and waits till there comes at last the mighty rescuing friend Death—mysterious New Birth. Then it finds itself once more animating a stainless body, standing not indeed among the happy sisters, but free to climb towards them, carrying no defilements with it." No "Echo from the Past," she was grateful to say, told her this was so, but something more "deeply convincing, more illuminating than reason or the evidence of the senses."

With this glimpse into the noble Christian soul of Anne Gilchrist, it becomes interesting to see how the certain poems to which Rossetti referred were received by her.

"Who so well able to bear it," she asks, "as she who, having been a happy wife and mother, has learned to accept all things with tenderness, to feel a sacredness in all?" Her only doubt was expressed in the thought that perhaps Whitman had forgotten, or through some theory in his head had overridden, the truth that "our instincts are beautiful facts of nature as well as our bodies," and that we have a "strong instinct of silence about some things." When, however, she had read the "beautiful, despised" poems of *Children of Adam* by the "light that glows out of the rest of the volume, by



the light of a clear, strong faith in God, of an unfathomably deep and tender love for humanity, light shed out of a soul that is possessed of itself," she wrote Rossetti he argued rightly that her confidence would not be betrayed by any of the poems in the book. None of them, she said, troubled her even for a moment; because she saw at a glance that it was not, as men had supposed, the "heights brought down to the depths, but the depths lifted up level with the sunlit heights, that they might become clear and sunlit too."

In this poet, she saw always for woman, "a veil woven out of her own soul—never touched upon even with a rough hand;" and for man a "daring, fearless pride in himself, not a mock-modesty woven out of delusions." "Do they not see," she continues, "that this fearless pride, this complete acceptance of themselves, is needful for her pride, her justification? What! is it all so ignoble, so base, that it will not bear the honest light of speech from lips so gifted with the divine power to use words? Then what hateful, bitter humiliation for her to have to give herself up to the reality. It must surely be man's fault, not God's, that she has to say to herself, Motherhood is beautiful, fatherhood is beautiful; but the dawn of fatherhood and motherhood is not beautiful. . . . It is true that instinct of silence I spoke of is a beautiful, imperishable part of nature

too. But it is not beautiful when it means an ignominious shame brooding darkly. It was needed that this silence, this evil spell, should for once be broken, and the daylight let in, that the dark cloud lying under might be scattered to the winds. It was needed that one who could here indicate for us 'the path between reality and the soul' should speak. . . . Now silence may brood again; but lovingly, happily as protecting what is beautiful, not as hiding what is unbeautiful; consciously enfolding a sweet and sacred mystery—august even as the mystery of Death, the dawn as the setting; kindred grandeurs which to eyes that are opened shed a hallowing beauty on all that surrounds and preludes them. He who can look with fearlessness at the beauty of Death—

"'O vast and well-veiled Death!

O the beautiful touch of Death, soothing and benumbing,'

—may well dare to teach us to look with fearless, untroubled eyes at the perfect beauty of Love in all its appointed realities. Now none need turn away their thoughts with pain or shame; though only lovers and poets may say what they will—the lover to his own, the poet to all, because all are in a sense his own."

But where shall we stop in this splendid rush of thought of this high-minded, pure-hearted woman? for only such could so express herself in this day,

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when so much of thought and feeling is tinged with the false and shallow teaching of the ages.

May I be allowed right here to tell of one of the finest compliments ever paid a woman? It was during a conversation with Walt Whitman in his Camden home on this very subject—the advisability of giving to the public eye things meant for the silences. After a somewhat lengthy expression of my opinion, when the matter was considered one of taste rather than of morals, he looked at me earnestly as he extended his hand, and said in that wondrously sweet voice of his, “I want to thank you, as a woman, for the *capacity* of understanding me;” then, after a moment’s pause, he added somewhat meditatively, “Perhaps only the combination of the pure heart and the broad mind makes this possible.”

How many times this thought has come to me, on seeing women’s minds “so stuck” to a few phrases in his work that they could not soar on the wings of his poetry and say—

“Over the mountain-growths, disease and sorrow,  
An uncaught bird is ever hovering, hovering,  
High in the purer, happier air.

“From imperfection’s murkiest cloud  
Darts always forth one ray of perfect light,  
One flash of heaven’s glory.

“To fashions, customs, discord,  
To the mad Babel-din, the deafening orgies,

Anne Gilchrist and

Soothing each lull a strain is heard, just heard,  
From some far shore the final chorus sounding.

“O the blest eyes, the happy hearts  
That see, that know the guiding thread so fine  
Along the mighty labyrinth.”

—(*Song of the Universal.*)

Or

“In this broad earth of ours,  
Amid the measureless grossness and the slag,  
Enclosed and safe, within its central heart,  
Nestles the seed perfection.”

—(*Song of the Universal.*)

This all-embracing truth of the poet, including within its scope every created thing, and with deepest significance every part, faculty, attitude, healthful impulse, mind and body of a man (each and all facing towards and related to the Infinite on every side), was what so impressed Anne Gilchrist. She was firmly convinced that a perfectly fearless, candid, ennobling treatment of the life of the body, so inextricably intertwined with, so potent in its influence on the life of the soul, would “prove of inestimable value to all earnest aspiring natures, impatient of the folly of the long-prevalent belief that it is because of the greatness of the spirit that it has learned to despise the body, and to ignore its influence.” She felt that the spirit must “lovingly embrace the body, as the roots of a tree embrace the ground, drawing therein rich nourishment, warmth,



## Walt Whitman

impulse." The great tide of healthful life that carries all before it must surge through the whole man, not beat to and fro in one corner of his brain.

"O the life of my senses and flesh, transcending my senses and flesh!" She had no fear that the poet's utterances, however harmless in themselves, would prove harmful by falling into the hands of those for whom they were manifestly unsuitable; for she believed that "innocence was folded round with such thick folds of ignorance till the right way and time for it to accept knowledge that what was unsuitable was also unintelligible." She became more and more convinced that the harm arose from the dark shadow cast on the white page from without—the misconstruction of foolish people, traitors to themselves, poorly comprehending the grandeur or beauty of their own natures. Remove this shadow, she said, trust Nature to do her own teaching to individual consciousness, and all would learn, through the poet, the divinity of the temple of the spirit, the glories possible to it, which, through false teachings, had been denied. This thought she knew was not now realized. But she was sure that when the "most vital and practical of facts that there was no particle of matter in the universe but had reference to soul" was seen to be true, we should understand all, love all, and fear nothing. Then, she persuaded herself, Walt Whitman's poems would be "dear to the hearts

of many women, and that the husbands of those women would be the happiest of husbands." She felt a persuasion, the "strength and persistency" of which astonished her, that it was possible for a woman so to treat the difficult subject as to command respect, though it might not be possible at present to win more than a dozen persons in the world to the truest conception. A point was gained, however, if hearts and minds would no longer look at the poet through the distorting medium bred by an utter misconception. She believed that some of his poems would never be rightly apprehended by men until some woman had the courage to speak. "His utterances," she wrote, "needed corroboration, acceptance from a woman (as closely concerned as man in this question and approaching it from entirely distinct standing-ground) before it could be accepted by men."

Her conviction that these poems had in them the "seeds of such immeasurably grand results for the world" that any delay in the successful planting of them was grievous; the pain and indignation she felt at the thought of how that "great name had been saluted chiefly with injurious epithets and hateful imputations;" the belief that "none but a woman could be the decisive judge of the question involved in these attacks (she being supplied with finer, subtler tests);" the clear, sweet

consciousness that men and women might "trust her to the uttermost in this, even if they could not at present see the matter at all as she did;" all these things made her absolutely fearless in deciding to accept Mr. Rossetti's proposal to have her letters to him on the subject arranged for the public eye. He had been deeply impressed with her thought, considering it the "fullest, farthest-reaching and most eloquent appreciation of Whitman" which had then appeared. He deemed it all the more valuable because the expression of what a *woman* saw in the poet, especially such a woman, whom to know was "to respect and esteem in every relation, whether of character, intellect or culture." He wrote a prelude in accordance with her request, for she confessed she never could have written so frankly but for the implicit faith that he would understand her aright. She fully realized her position in advocating a poet which the world had not yet understood. "I often feel," she wrote, "as if my enterprise was very like Lady Godiva's—as if hers, indeed, were typical of mine. For she slipped the veil from woman's body for a good cause, and I from a woman's soul for a good cause. And no man has ever dared to find any fault with her."

On the work being received in America, the friends of Walt Whitman were "infinitely indebted, beyond words, for so broad and luminous an interpretation of his pages." Mr. Wm. D. O'Connor,

upon receiving it, wrote, "The lady's contribution is simply superb. Unquestionably the finest and fullest appreciation yet uttered." Later he wrote, "Our Bird of Paradise has found a perch in the May number of the *Radical*." (1870.) And to-day, "An Englishwoman's estimate of Walt Whitman" is one of the finest contributions to Whitman literature.

Walt Whitman himself was deeply touched with this "burst of sunlight over the sea." "Nothing," he wrote Wm. M. Rossetti, after having received word direct from Mrs. Gilchrist, "nothing in my life, or my literary fortunes, has brought me more comfort and support every way—nothing has more spiritually soothed me—than the warm appreciation of friendship of that true, full-grown woman (I still use the broad, grand old Saxon word, our highest need)." To his dying day the poet never forgot this ray of hope in his lonely, self-made way.

The effect of Anne Gilchrist's study of Walt Whitman was already being seen in her judgment of other poets. Mr. Rossetti's *Memoir of Shelley* led her to restudy Shelley. His criticism of Mr. Swinburne caused an animated discussion between the two friends of that poet's work. While his *Ballads of Burdens* interested Rossetti, as Ecclesiastes would, she felt it to be the "trite, dreary, sickly conceptions of life that have already been



## Walt Whitman

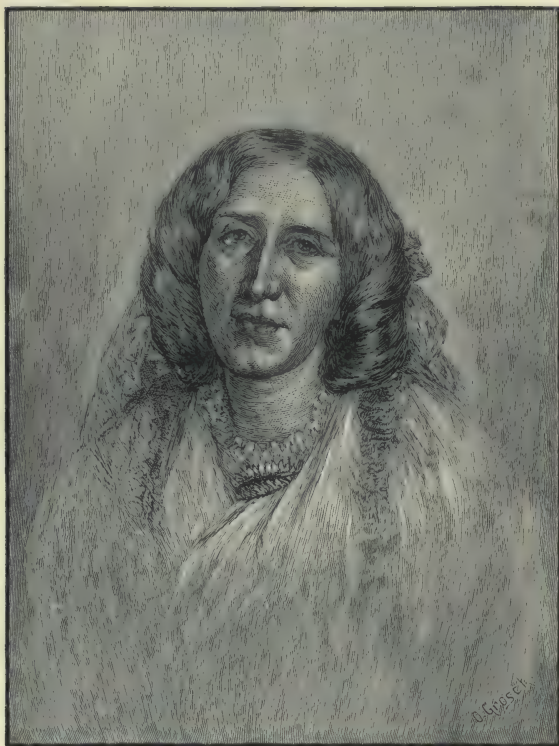
uttered *ad nauseam*," though, she had to confess, "never so musically uttered before." Her nature was panting for healthier life, the free, fresh, growing life of humanity. The emotion of Swinburne seemed to her the "effluence of a heated brain, not of a strong, beating heart."

"Was there ever before a gifted man so barren of great thoughts or deep feelings?" she asked Rossetti. But she said she could go any length with him in admiration of Victor Hugo, "*cet héros au doux sourire*," as she always thought of him.

In these days in her Brookbank home, passed in a life of "earnest, warm and unfrittered simplicity," Anne Gilchrist held an "even and sensitive balance between the claims of family affection and those of intellectual activity." She was "genial, courageous, and steady in all her likings and habits," with a manner, says her son, "remarkably cordial without gushingness." She had an eminently *speaking* face, the full, dark, liquid eyes, extremely vivacious, being the marked feature. Her "ready quick-thoughted kindness" was what George Eliot especially noted in the correspondence which led to the renting of Brookbank to her and Mr. Lewis for the summer of 1871. This little "queer cottage" where, as George Eliot wrote Anne, "the exquisite stillness in the sunshine, and a sense of distance from London hurry which encourages the growth of patience," were such a joy to her, became so

dear to them both that they "were loth to leave" when the lease of a few months was up. The shelves were so laden with books that they regretted having brought any of their own. They found the reading of the *Life of Blake* especially interesting 'midst the cloud of Blake drawings and engravings which adorned the walls. They were as pleased with these as Tennyson had been. In the long drawing-room with its antique furniture, the red rose and honeysuckle peeping in through the bow-window, George Eliot wrote day after day the second part of *Middlemarch*. The old prints on the walls, "charming children of Sir Joshua, and large-hatted ladies of his and Romney," were her "dumb companions." She declared if ever she stole anything, it would be the two little Sir Joshuas over the drawing-room mantel-piece, Master Lord Burghersh, and little Miss Theopila Gwatkin. All this surrounding may have suggested the house of Mrs. Meyrick in *Daniel Deronda*, where the "narrow spaces of wall held a world-history in scenes and heads."

Work went on smoothly to both George Eliot and Mr. Lewes, away from all friendly interruptions. Their habits here, as in London, were of clock-work regularity. "We are like two secluded owls," she wrote a friend, "wise with unfashionable wisdom, and knowing nothing of pictures and French plays. I read aloud—almost all the even-



GEORGE ELIOT.





ing—books of German science and other gravities.” To another friend she wrote of the beauty of the region, “perpetual undulation of heath and copse, clear views of hurrying water with here and there a grand pine wood, steep, wood-clothed promontories and gleaming pools.” In this atmosphere she read our Lowell’s *My Study Windows*. “If you want delightful reading,” she declared, “read in that the essays called ‘My Garden Acquaintances,’ and ‘Winter.’” Occasionally they went the uphill road to see Tennyson, who, from his house about three miles from Shottermill, had found them out. Miss Blind, in her biography of George Eliot, tells how, on one of these visits, after a warm argument on Evolution and kindred thought the poet called to her, as she wended her way down the hill after the farewell, “Well, good-bye, you and your molecules!” Looking back, she replied in her low, deep voice, “I am quite content with my molecules!” When they left the little cottage, a most cordial invitation was extended to Mrs. Gilchrist to come to their Sunday “At Homes.” But the way never opened for a personal meeting. George Eliot, however, never forgot Shottermill, where, as she wrote Anne, who had used the phrase, she had a “sense of standing on a round world,” which was “precisely what she most cared for amongst out-of-door delights.”

Five years later, in 1876, when she and Mr.

Lewes bought a place not far off, *The Heights*, at Witley, Surrey (which became a favorite country home), they had the same kind of beautiful open scenery. There Mr. Lewes spent his last summer on earth, and there George Eliot came with her husband, Mr. Cross, after their tour in Italy.

It is possible that Anne Gilchrist's love for the work of Walt Whitman influenced George Eliot to a further study of him. She may have found among Anne's books at Brookbank the *Radical* containing her estimate of him, as it was published only the year before. However that may be, we do know that George Eliot came to change her opinion that Whitman had nothing "spiritually needful for her," to a confession that he *did* contain what was good for her soul."

The summer that Brookbank was occupied by the Lewes', Anne was with her aged mother at the ancestral home at Earls Colne, where annual visits were always paid. There, in the old-fashioned flower-bordered garden, or in some pet field, she roamed, listened to the singing of the birds, and ever had "happy thoughts of her children and their future together." She read the *Idylls of the King* and *The Holy Grail* which the Tennysons sent her. But, above all, she dwelt upon "Walt Whitman and his divine poems." They not only made Nature dearer to her, but deepened her feeling for human nature. She came to realize more

## Walt Whitman

what comradeship meant. These poems, associated as they were with William Michael Rossetti, made his friendship a constant delight—a friendship “never clouded by a breath of coldness or dissatisfaction.” When settled the following winter in her native London\* for the better education of her children, it was a pleasure to congratulate him upon his approaching marriage with Miss Lucy Madox Brown; for she was still an earnest believer in the “enlarged, deepened, completed life only to be attained through a happy marriage.” On the death of the wife of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, she “sighed with happiness,” as she wrote him, “to realize that the earth did bear on its bosom such sweet life for two human creatures.” After trying to console him with the thought that it was only a pause in that blended life, only one of the two hidden for a few yards by a bend of the road,” she cried out, “But how could God spare the sight of such happiness out of His universe?”

A visit to America had been in Anne Gilchrist's mind for some time. At last, in the Centennial year (1876), she decided to go there with her son, Herbert, then about twenty years of age, and her daughters “Bee” and “Giddy,” as Walt Whitman calls them in a letter. Before sailing in August, she was rejoiced to see a goodly list of names of

\* Anne Gilchrist was born at 7 Gower street, London, February 25, 1828, the same year as Dante G. Rossetti.

persons who, through her and Mr. Rossetti's instrumentality, had agreed to buy a copy of Walt Whitman's Centennial edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Inspired by the eloquent letter of Robert Buchanan following a review in the *Daily News*, Tennyson had sent the poet five pounds. Although Buchanan intimated to Whitman that no books were expected in return, he preferred to send him his new edition of two volumes, which he did. "I am not at all sure," he had already written Rossetti, "that Alfred Tennyson *sees my poems*, but I do *his* ; and strongly, (and there, perhaps, I have the advantage of him) ; but I think *he sees me* ; and nothing could have evidenced more courtesy and manliness and hospitality than his letters to me have shown for five years." This kind, helpful interest of English friends was never forgotten by Walt Whitman. "Forevermore I shall love old England," he said to Sidney Morse when he was at his home sculpturing a bust of him. "It all comes over me now, and always does when I think of it, like a great succouring love. You should have seen the tears, Sidney, or you shouldn't. With no discounting of friends at home, I must say that English business stands apart in my thought from all else—the money and the friendliness of it all."

Upon arriving in Philadelphia, Anne was favorably impressed with the city, with its "long straight streets at right angles to each other, long and



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broad enough to look as if they must lead somewhere very pleasant." It was "more picturesque and foreign-looking" than she expected. Its freedom from smoke and soot pleased her. Friends were soon made. John Burroughs called a few days after her arrival, and "much she liked him." But the chief joy was meeting Walt Whitman, who, she wrote Rossetti, "fully realized the ideal she had formed from his poems," and brought such an "atmosphere of cordiality with him as is indescribable." This atmosphere of cordiality was what particularly impressed me in visiting the poet in his Camden home. Although confined to his room, ill-health did not quench the spirit of love which animated his face and guided his action—the love of comradeship which engendered a personal interest and a loyal affection. It was at the time when my little gratuitous work in his behalf, *Gems from Walt Whitman*, was being published by David McKay (1889). He showed interest in every detail, even providing the biographical facts for it. He had already sent me two most appreciative letters for the article on his life among the soldiers included in the book, when it appeared in the *New York Critic*.

Those who have had the friendship of Walt Whitman know how much he meant when he said, "Thank you deeply." This capacity for grateful affection Anne Gilchrist fully appreciated; and the

poet was only too happy for the opportunity now given for personal expression. Day after day he came to her boarding-place in Philadelphia, (1929 North 22d street.) Every evening but Sunday he was likely to be at her right hand in the circle gathered around her tea-table. His white hair and beard gave him a look of age "curiously contradicted by his face," she wrote Rossetti, "which has not only the ruddy freshness, but the full-rounded contour of youth, nowhere drawn or wrinkled or sunk—a face indicative of serenity and goodness." As a result of a paralytic stroke, he inclined "to drag rather than lift" the left leg. She was always impressed with his striking personality. One evening, when Joaquin Miller was a guest at the tea-table, he came in a little late. "Ah!" exclaimed Miller, as he arose to greet him, "He looks like a god to-night!"

In referring to those days, Joaquin Miller wrote me from his California home in December, 1896, that Mrs. Gilchrist "would not be forgotten—Walt was ever safe in her hands." In those evenings, rich in conversation and friendly greetings, the good gray poet rarely read his own poems. He inclined more to discuss the work and personality of others. Years afterward Grace, or "Giddy" as they then called her, added her public impressions, to those of her brother Herbert, of the two years her family spent in the Quaker City of Philadelphia.

She recalled the rich personality of Whitman, when, after supper, they would all take their chairs out "American fashion, beside the stoop—that is on the pavement below the front steps of the house"—and have the friendly evening together. The poet, sitting in a large bamboo rocking-chair, would declaim scenes from Tennyson, Shakespeare and others, but would rarely recite anything of his own. She recalled "The Mystic Trumpeter" as one he oftenest recited, that having been a favorite one for his recital to the soldiers in the hospitals. She referred to his confession that he could not find the satisfaction in Shakespeare's heroines that some did. "I think," he said, "it is partly owing to the fact that women never actually acted in Shakespeare's time; boys were dressed up, and Shakespeare must have had those in mind." He declared he felt like comparing his plays to "large, rich, splendid tapestry, like Raphael's historical cartoons, where everything is broad and colossal. Royal kings and queens did not really talk like that, but ought to if they did not; it is redeemed in that way. Now you can't say that of Nature—a tree is what it is, and you can't make it out better than it is." At another time he said he didn't care for "Strawberry teas" and the like. He enjoyed "being with those he loved, and was never tired of that."

The son Herbert, in his biography, recalls interesting incidents of these friendly gatherings at the

boarding-place of his mother in Philadelphia. At one time she persuaded him to read *Romola*, knowing that George Eliot was not a favorite of his. The result, however, was not satisfactory. The book seemed to him more "like a mosaic, each bit good," but he wanted a "thread, something to carry him on in a novel." He thought *Romola* was "statuesque; her author always poses her before the reader is allowed to see her, as a photographer does—'your chin a little higher, please!'" The story was melancholy to him. "Ah!" he exclaimed, "when the Greeks treated of tragedy, how differently it was done. They did it in a lofty way, so that there seemed to be fulfillment in defeat; a tragedy as treated by the ancients inspires—fills one with hope." He once said that Walter Scott was ever a great favorite with him, especially his *Heart of Mid-Lothian*. His work breathed more of the open air than of the workshop. His humanity refreshed him. At another time, referring to Burns, he spoke of his large humanity. "Convivial Burns!" he exclaimed, "fond of comrades, of talking and joking; I think that I, nay, that we, should all have liked him. What a tragedy his life was, poor fellow!" Walt always spoke of George Sand's work with interest, especially *Consuelo*. His knowledge of music and the drama made his discussion on those subjects interesting, for Mrs. Gilchrist was musical by nature and education. When they were



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in a box seeing Joaquin Miller's new play, *The Danites*, she noticed that though now and then he nodded approval, he did it with the reserve of an old playgoer who had seen the great artists.

But it was as a democrat she saw the richest life in him—his love for the individual *everywhere*—for the person itself, aside from the profession.

"I am the bard of personality," he said, much to her joy, for in that she saw soul-recognition for the humblest. Speaking of Tennyson one evening, he said it was a pity for such a personality as his not to invest more of his capital in comradeship. "Literary men and artists seem to shrink from companionship; to me it is exhilarating; affects me in the same way that the light or storm does." He said that though he liked Thoreau, what he once said to him, when walking in his favorite Brooklyn, jarred on him. "What is there in people? Pshaw! what do you (a man who sees as well as anybody) see in all this cheating, political corruption?" He felt that it was not so much a love of woods, streams and hills that made Thoreau live in the country, as a morbid dislike of humanity. He even felt a little vexed, at times, that the good William (Shakespeare) should have failed to see anything in the common people; for, unless it be the faithful servant in *As You Like It*, there was not a single character of the people in his plays who was not a booby (Jack Cade, Bottom)—and no

doubt they were—only it showed him how entirely Shakespeare was absorbed in the feudalism of his time. Walt often spoke of his own experiences with those who were ignorant of him as a writer or poet. Poets and artists were such “far-off things” to many of them, that he declared he found real entertainment in their opinions, and even in their astonishment that one such could come among them talking freely. He enjoyed giving his reminiscences of the war to pilot-men, engineers, car-drivers, etc. He noted all the criticisms, referring one time to a piece of advice he received from an old fellow who, after having read *Leaves of Grass*, asked, very earnestly, why he didn't study Addison. “You ought to read Addison's works,” he concluded gravely.

When Edward Carpenter came to America, mainly to see the “good, gray poet,” Walt took him to call on Anne. Her predilection to science, leading her mind to the roots of things, made her an interesting companion. One can easily imagine these three large natures talking together of the new forms of poetry, of democracy, and other subjects. Anne, according to her son, was a “good and rather copious talker, serious and amusing as well,” and had a most musical voice. Her large, loving nature and fine sympathy made her liberal and charitable. Walt called her his “noblest woman friend” as well as “science-friend.” (*Going*

## Walt Whitman

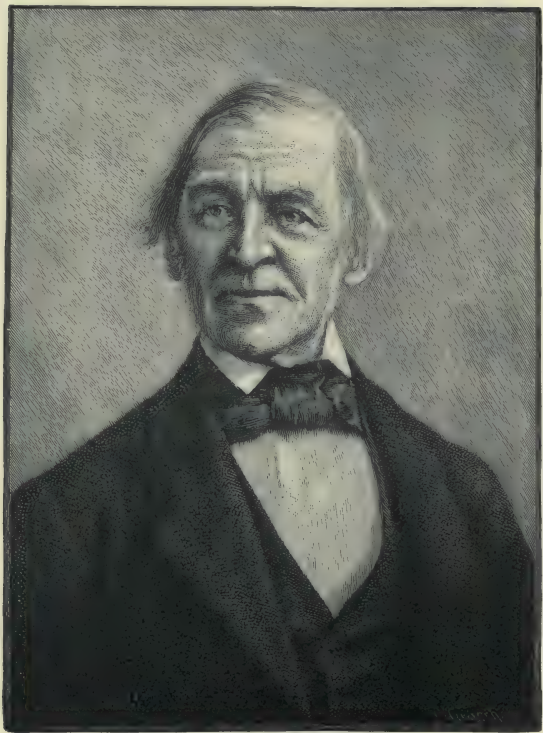
*Somewhere*.) Her nobility of soul was the secret of this great capacity for friendship with great minds. She could not stoop to the vulgar or to the superficial. "I never knew a woman," said Rossetti, "who, while maintaining a decorous social position, from which she never deviated or derogated by a hair's breath, showed less propensity towards any of those social distinctions which are essentially factitious and arbitrary." And years afterward, in 1897, referring to her in a letter to me, he said he always thought of her with "affection and respect."

Her friend, Mrs. Elizabeth Robbins Pennell, referred to this splendid capacity for friendship in writing of her in the *New York Critic*. She says her letters to her friends were "more full of thought and more finished in style than many of the articles published in papers and reviews." Some of her most "beautiful, characteristic, and copious" letters were, according to the *Athenæum*, written to her great American friend, Walt Whitman. These the poet kept as sacred to his dying day. On being appealed to by Herbert Gilchrist to give them, or parts of them, for publication in the biography of his mother, he said he could not furnish any good reason, but he felt to keep these utterances exclusively to himself.

While in America, Mrs. Gilchrist's pen was not idle. Besides prose translations from Victor Hugo's

*La Legende des Siècles*, letters, etc., she wrote an occasional article or essay. One written at Northampton, Massachusetts (where she went after her two years' stay in Philadelphia), under the title "Three Glimpses of a New England Village," eventually appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine*. (November, 1884.) In this she pleasantly compared the New England valley to the English weald of Sussex, acknowledging its advantage of a broad and beautiful river winding through it (the Connecticut), while its hills were about two hundred feet higher. By signs in the Amherst Museum, she judged that New England was old compared to Old England, since for ages one had dry land, while the other had a waste of waters. She not only pictured the natural beauties of the region, but its history, including the long-supposed "miraculous deliverance" in old Hatfield, of which Sir Walter Scott, Cooper, Miss Sedgwick and Hawthorne had treated. She was in love, like all of us, with Hatfield's wide street with its double avenue of superb elms, looking to her more like the entrance to a fine park than a village street. Socially, the town reminded her of Cranford, but "Cranford with a difference." There was the same preponderance of maiden ladies and widows; the same tea-parties with a "solitary beau in the centre like the one white flower in the middle of a nosegay;" the same "modest goodness, kindness, refinement, making the best of





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limited means and of restricted interests." But she made haste to say the heroines did not wait for the "inevitable, faithful, long-absent, mysteriously-returning-at-the-right-moment-love to redeem their lives from triviality, and renew their faded bloom;" they lived the modern life—Miss Smith founded a college, and Miss Harriet Rogers opened the way for the dumb to speak. She came to see that the great forces which were building up a people's life worked silently beneath the surface; that in spite of "newspapers, telegrams, travellers, a common language and ancestry," misconceptions between America and her own country abounded. Only, she believed, by the help of vital literature could souls of nations come at last to speak to one another.

Through letters of introduction from Mr. Rossetti, she met, when in Boston, a circle of interesting people, including Charles Eliot Norton, Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Horace E. Scudder, etc., many of whom she said were of "such intelligence, culture and geniality, that it was tantalizing to have but brief intercourse with them." She said she made more acquaintances in two months spent there than in her whole life before. She found Longfellow to be the "most kindly, good-natured, unaffected man possible, quite unspoiled by his great popularity;" while Emerson, with whom she spent two evenings during her

stay in Concord, was the "picture of health and cheerful serenity, having just such a home, spacious, comfortable, as one could desire for him." He seemed to her to be the central figure in the town, "personally beloved and honored by his townsmen in a way pleasant to see, as well he may be." As they were both friends of Carlyle, the conversation often reverted to him. "Sleepy Hollow" was to her the "sweetest last resting-place poet could desire." When, later, she was in New York City, she looked back with increasing delight to her three weeks' stay in Concord, when she found warm friends in Frederick May Holland and Mrs. Holland. She wrote them she could not forget her daily rows on the little river, which, to use a favorite American phrase, was "just as pretty as can be." "The Americans call it a mere stream," she wrote Rossetti, "but the English would regard it as a river of respectable dimensions."

While in New York she had some memorable evenings with Richard Watson Gilder and other literary lights. But she missed the companionship of Walt Whitman, which had so filled the Philadelphia life. He was near and yet so far, though letters passed between them. He was on hand, however, when the time came for the return to England, June 7, 1879. They felt the parting deeply, for her three years' stay in America had been a real joy and inspiration to both.



## Walt Whitman

On arriving in England, Mrs. Gilchrist settled for a time with her eldest son, wife, and baby ten months old, in a little red-tiled village, in sight of Durham Cathedral, to her the "noblest sample of Normanesque in England." Twenty-eight years before, just after her marriage, she had spent a week there; now, after all her wanderings of soul and body into new and strange regions, she was there again, enjoying her children and the grandson who was to her an "endless source of delight, as sunny and full of ceaseless movement as the sea." Walt Whitman, in replying to a letter of hers from this home, said he should like to see that Cathedral, but he didn't know to which he should go first—to "the *Cathedral* or *that baby!*"

She found "very precious" a little map he sent, on which he traced in blue ink all the wanderings of his youth, and in red, his recent journey to the Rocky Mountains. "Wonders, revelations, I would not have missed for my life," he wrote. "Fifty years from now this region will have a hundred millions of people, the most comfortable, advanced and democratic on the globe; indeed, it is all *this* and *here* that America is for."

She had always noted this intense love for his own land; and yet, it was not at the expense of other lands. In one of their Philadelphia tea-table talks he had wished he could "poke about

amongst the antiquities of Europe for two years." He was sure he would appreciate the treasures, adding, slowly, "They are for me." I remember my first thought on seeing the Vatican "torso" was how Walt would have enjoyed it! I had the same feeling when in the Elgin room of the British Museum.

On the return of Mrs. Gilchrist, Tennyson went to see her, and talked of Walt Whitman and America. He mentioned Niagara Falls as being an inducement to him to cross the ocean. In lunching with him she saw his beautiful grandson, and, of course, compared him with her own.

Letters from America kept Anne in touch with that country, upon which she looked back as a "magnificent, sunny land of promise," which, if it did not attain to a higher ideal than had anywhere been reached, "humanity was a failure and a mistake;" for its chances there were "splendid, physical, social, intellectual." She felt as if she must go there again sometime, where there was "such intellectual stir and brightness, such sense of expansion and encouragement, sunshine without and sunshine within." And yet to her it was "vast, complex, contradictory phenomenal America," as she wrote Rossetti. She did love and appreciate its sunlight. "Don't you Americans grumble about your climate," she wrote the Hollands in Concord one foggy day, "for it is splendid; leave

all the grumbling and some of the boasting to us !”

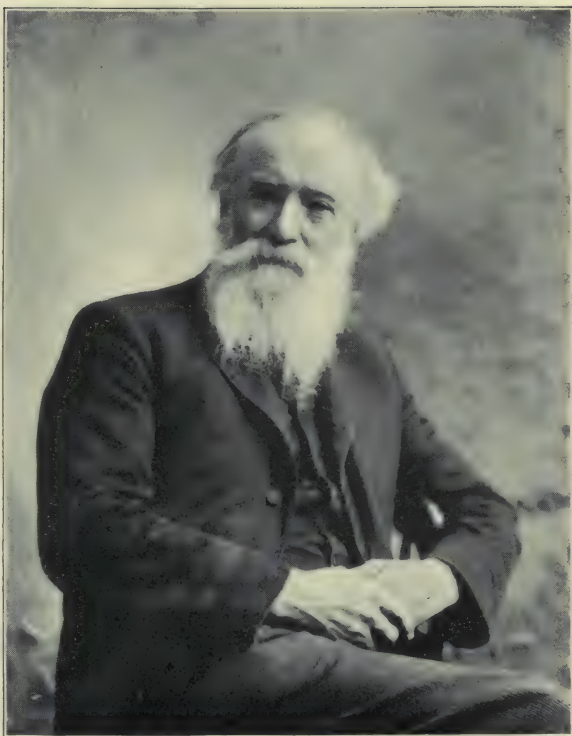
A delightful correspondence with John Burroughs was followed by his visit to London. He wished her to tell him the secret of the attraction that London had for “such a city-hater” as he; for there was something in the air and in the expression of things that was different from—more tender and majestic than—anything he had experienced in cities at home. It seemed to exist “not for commerce or trade, like New York, but for life.” Upon asking her what was this “subtle charm apart from its obvious advantages and benefits,” she replied she could not explain it. “It is too much a part of me,” she said, “born and bred as I was there, for it to be possible for me to look at it from without, or to question it as a whole; it is a curious miscellaneous bundle of experiences and associations to me; happy, unhappy, indifferent; and sometimes it looks grand to me, and sometimes almost demoniac—with its miles of misery seething in the yellow, murky air—and its hard and cruel prosperity—miles of that too; but I suppose neither the one nor the other is half so bad as it looks, and that there is a solid good heart and the best of brains within the monster.” She hoped that on his next visit to London he would see more of “English humanity;” not “society,” but a few men and women in easy, friendly intercourse, such

as, perhaps, could be gathered from time to time ; and, she concluded, "I can answer for their taking cordially to you and you to them."

He wrote her that he was resting in the hope that she would give herself up to writing the article on Walt Whitman for which they were all looking. "I feel sure," he said, "that you will cut your way to the heart of this matter as no one has yet done."

But just then she had other work to do, the *Life of Mary Lamb* for the Eminent Women Series, written at the request of John H. Ingram. The writing of this was a "great solace" to her. It enabled her to bring out the domestic side of Charles Lamb in a clearer light than Talfourd or Procter had done. On its publication in 1883, Mary Cowden Clark wrote her, from Genoa, a most appreciative letter, regarding it as one of the "most perfect pieces of biographical compositions" she ever read. She noted particularly the "exquisitely tender spirit" in which she had achieved her task. The *Academy* pronounced it to be a "thoughtful and sympathetic life." W. M. Rossetti said of it, "A very substantial, able and even masterly piece of work ; full without wordiness and remarkable for that true and nice discrimination of character which neither sympathy without comprehension nor comprehension unprompted by sympathy could supply." It was said to be the best of the series, and, with one exception, the most popular.





JOHN BURROUGHS.



## Walt Whitman

When this work was done, Mrs. Gilchrist did not forget John Burroughs' desire and advice. "I must try once more," she wrote, "to give a reason for the faith that is in me." As a result, "A Confession of Faith"\* was written, which proved to be about her last piece of finished work. It was published in a London magazine a short time before her death. "Most people will think her worship of Walt Whitman excessive," said the *Athenæum* (March 26, 1887), "but that its effect on her own character was wholly beneficial can hardly be doubted."

She was living at this time in the Hampstead home, bought in 1879. A deep bow-window gave her a pretty outlook over an old Hampstead garden. With different friends, or alone, she took quiet rambles on the Hampstead Heath, or through the old streets where Constable and Richardson had worked, and where Du Maurier and many another artist lived. Her hospitable home was thrown open on Sundays to her friends, including Sir Frederick Leighton and other London artists. In this Hampstead home she prepared a second edition of the *Life of William Blake*, to which she added a *Memoir* of her husband. In this, as in the earlier edition, she had the assistance of the Rossettis, especially Dante Gabriel. She ever appreciated the genius of this painter, and

\* See Appendix.

mourned his departure from earth. His death, she wrote the brother William, made her believe more than ever "in Nature's great laws of Continuity and Indestructibility for souls as well as for atoms and forces." If she had not believed this, as well as in the "transfers and promotions," she said she could not have borne the burden of life after her daughter Beatrice was taken from her.

In this Hampstead home she had begun some personal reminiscences of the Carlyles when her last illness came upon her. The "transfer and promotion" was finally hers one Sunday evening in November, 1885 (November 29), when she gave herself up to the "sure-enwinding arms of cool-enfolding death." She was in her fifty-eighth year, and it was just twenty-four years, lacking a day, since her husband had been taken from her.

The leading London journals paid most beautiful tributes to her. *The Academy* (December 5, 1885) said "she combined in an unusual degree the qualities of mature wisdom, fine literary tact, and a perfect womanly sweetness of temper."

Edward Dowden wrote, "I shall always have the memory of her brightness, kindness, wisdom; and of the varied learning and culture which appeared, as it were, under and through a genial humanity that put a spell on one beyond culture or learning."

Her American friends deeply mourned her. John



## Walt Whitman

Burroughs, upon hearing the news, wrote her son Herbert, "Few men have had such a mother as you. She was the only woman I have ever seen to whose strength of mind and character I humbly bowed. As I think of her death, a shadow comes over the whole of that beautiful land ; now she is gone, I see how much she stood to me for all England."

Walt Whitman, on being told the news, sat quiet, and finally, in a deeper tone than usual, he said, "A sincere and loving friend." (Donaldson's *Walt Whitman*.) He wrote to Herbert, "Nothing now remains but a sweet and rich memory—none more beautiful, all time, all life, all the earth." But he could not go on—he "must sit alone and think."

Later, however, when this son was preparing a biography of his mother, the poet made haste to write, "I cannot let your book go to press without at least saying—and wishing it put on record—that among the perfect women I have known (and it has been my unspeakable good fortune to have had the very best for mother, sisters and friends), I have known none more perfect in every relation than my dear, dear friend, Anne Gilchrist."

To the close of his life, nearly seven years later, he ever held her in tender remembrance. Whenever he mused and thought of his best friends in their distant homes, either here or within the veil—of William O'Connor, of Maurice Bucke, of John

Burroughs, he included her—"friends of my soul—stauncest friends of my other soul, my poems." At his last birthday dinner on earth—1891—upon hearing greetings read from some English ladies, he said, "I ask myself more than a little if my best friends have not been women. My friend, Mrs. Gilchrist, one of the earliest, a picked woman, profound, noble, sacrificing, saw clearly when almost everybody else was interested in raising the dust—obscuring what was true."

One cannot read his tribute to her—*Going Somewhere*—without catching glimpses of the breadth and depth of soul which animated their intercourse,

"My science-friend, my noblest woman-friend,  
(Now buried in an English grave—and this a memory-leaf  
for her dear sake)

Ended our talk—The sum, concluding all we know of old  
or modern learning, intuitions deep,

Of all Geologies—Histories—of all Astronomy—of Evolution,  
Metaphysics, all,

Is that we all are onward, onward, speeding, slowly, surely,  
bettering,

Life, life an endless march, an endless army (no halt, but it  
is duly over),

The world, the race, the soul—in space and time the universes,

All bound as is befitting each—all surely going somewhere."

Whenever, in the far-distant future, Walt Whitman's poems shall be read—

("See, projected through time,  
For me an audience interminable,")

Walt Whitman

this tribute to Anne Gilchrist will be doubly glorious, because found to crown one of the grandest, purest affections this age or any age has revealed.

ELIZABETH PORTER GOULD.

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS.





APPENDIX

# A Confession of Faith

BY

ANNE GILCHRIST







ANNE GILCHRIST.



## A Confession of Faith

---

"Of genius in the Fine Arts," wrote Wordsworth, "the only infallible sign is the widening the sphere of human sensibility for the delight, honor, and benefit of human nature. Genius is the introduction of a new element into the intellectual universe, or, if that be not allowed, it is the application of powers to objects on which they had not before been exercised, or the employment of them in such a manner as to produce effects hitherto unknown. What is all this but an advance or conquest made by the soul of the poet? Is it to be supposed that the reader can make progress of this kind like an Indian prince or general stretched on his palanquin and borne by slaves? No; he is invigorated and inspirited by his leader in order that he may exert himself, for he cannot proceed in quiescence, he cannot be carried like a dead weight. Therefore to create taste is to call forth and bestow power."

A great poet, then, is "a challenge and summons;" and the question first of all is not whether we like or dislike him, but whether we are capable of meeting that challenge, of stepping out of our habitual selves to answer that summons. He works on Nature's plan: Nature, who teaches nothing but supplies infinite material to learn from; who never

## *A Confession of Faith*

preaches but drives home her meanings by the resistless eloquence of effects. Therefore the poet makes greater demands upon his reader than any other man. For it is not a question of swallowing his ideas or admiring his handiwork merely, but of seeing, feeling, enjoying, as he sees, feels, enjoys. "The messages of great poems to each man and woman are," says Walt Whitman, "come to us on equal terms, only then can you understand us. We are no better than you; what we enclose you enclose, what we enjoy you may enjoy"—no better than you potentially, that is; but if you would understand us the potential must become the actual, the dormant sympathies must awaken and broaden, the dulled perceptions clear themselves and let in undreamed of delights, the wonder-working imagination must respond, the ear attune itself, the languid soul inhale large draughts of love and hope and courage, those "empyreal airs" that vitalize the poet's world. No wonder the poet is long in finding his audience; no wonder he has to abide the "inexorable tests of Time," which, if indeed he be great, slowly turns the handful into hundreds, the hundreds into thousands, and at last, having done its worst, grudgingly passes him on into the ranks of the Immortals.

Meanwhile let not the handful who believe that such a destiny awaits a man of our time cease to give a reason for the faith that is in them.

So far as the suffrages of his own generation go Walt Whitman may, like Wordsworth, tell of the "love, the admiration, the indifference, the slight, the aversion and even the contempt" with which his poems have been received; but the love and ad-

miration are from even a smaller number, the aversion, the contempt more vehement, more universal and persistent than Wordsworth ever encountered. For the American is a more daring innovator; he cuts loose from precedent, is a very Columbus who has sailed forth alone on perilous seas to seek new shores, to seek a new world for the soul, a world that shall give scope and elevation and beauty to the changed and changing events, aspirations, conditions of modern life. To new aims, new methods; therefore let not the reader approach these poems as a judge, comparing, testing, measuring by what has gone before, but as a willing learner, an unprejudiced seeker for whatever may delight and nourish and exalt the soul. Neither let him be abashed nor daunted by the weight of adverse opinion, the contempt and denial which have been heaped upon the great American even though it be the contempt and denial of the capable, the cultivated, the recognized authorities; for such is the usual lot of the pioneer in whatever field. In religion it is above all to the earnest and conscientious believer that the Reformer has appeared a blasphemer, and in the world of literature it is equally natural that the most careful student, that the warmest lover of the accepted masterpieces, should be the most hostile to one who forsakes the methods by which, or at any rate, in company with which, those triumphs have been achieved. "But," said the wise Goethe, "I will listen to any man's convictions; you may keep your doubts, your negations to yourself, I have plenty of my own." For heartfelt convictions are rare things. Therefore I make bold to indicate the scope and source of power in Walt Whitman's

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writings, starting from no wider ground than their effect upon an individual mind. It is not criticism I have to offer; least of all any discussion of the question of form or formlessness in these poems, deeply convinced as I am that when great meanings and great emotions are expressed with corresponding power, literature has done its best, call it what you please. But my aim is rather to suggest such trains of thought, such experience of life as having served to put me *en rapport* with this poet may haply find here and there a reader who is thereby helped to the same end. Hence I quote just as freely from the prose (especially from "Democratic Vistas" and the preface to the first issue of "Leaves of Grass," 1855) as from his poems, and more freely, perhaps, from those parts that have proved a stumbling-block than from those whose conspicuous beauty assures them acceptance.

Fifteen years ago, with feelings partly of indifference, partly of antagonism,—for I had heard none but ill words of them—I first opened Walt Whitman's poems. But as I read I became conscious of receiving the most powerful influence that had ever come to me from any source. What was the spell? It was that in them humanity has, in a new sense, found itself; for the first time has dared to accept itself without disparagement, without reservation. For the first time an unrestricted faith in all that is and in the issues of all that happens has burst forth triumphantly into song.

" . . . The rapture of the hallelujah sent  
From all that breathes and is . . . "

rings through these poems. They carry up into



the region of Imagination and Passion those vaster and more profound conceptions of the universe and of man reached by centuries of that indomitably patient organized search for knowledge, that "skilful cross-questioning of things" called science.

"O truth of the earth I am determined to press my way toward you.  
Sound your voice! I scale the mountains, I dive in the sea after you,"

cried science; and the earth and the sky have answered, and continue inexhaustibly to answer her appeal. And now at last the day dawns which Wordsworth prophesied of: "The man of science," he wrote, "seeks truth as a remote and unknown benefactor; he cherishes and loves it in his solitude. The Poet, singing a song in which all human beings join with him, rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion. Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science, it is the first and last of all knowledge; it is immortal as the heart of man. If the labors of men of science should ever create any material revolution, direct or indirect, in our condition, and in the impressions which we habitually receive, the Poet will then sleep no more than at present; he will be ready to follow the steps of the man of science not only in those general indirect effects, but he will be at his side carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of science itself. If the time should ever come when what is now called science, thus familiarized to man, shall be ready to put on, as it were, a form of flesh and blood, the

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Poet will lend his divine spirit to aid the transfiguration, and will welcome the being thus produced as a dear and genuine inmate of the household of man." That time approaches : a new heaven and a new earth await us when the knowledge grasped by science is realized, conceived as a whole, related to the world within us by the shaping spirit of imagination. Not in vain, already, for this Poet have they pierced the darkness of the past, and read here and there a word of the earth's history before human eyes beheld it ; each word of infinite significance, because involving in it secrets of the whole. A new anthem of the slow, vast, mystic dawn of life he sings in the name of humanity :—

"I am an acme of things accomplish'd, and I am an encloser of things to be.

My feet strike an apex of the apices of the stairs ;  
On every step bunches of ages, and larger bunches between  
the steps ;  
All below duly travell'd and still I mount and mount.

Rise after rise bow the phantoms behind me :  
Afar down I see the huge first Nothing—I know  
I was even there ;  
I waited unseen and always, and slept through the lethargic  
mist,  
And took my time, and took no hurt from the fetid carbon.

Long I was hugg'd close—long and long.

Immense have been the preparations for me,  
Faithful and friendly the arms that have help'd me.

Cycles ferried my cradle, rowing and rowing like cheerful  
boatmen ;  
For room to me stars kept aside in their own rings,  
They sent influences to look after what was to hold me.

## Anne Gilchrist

Before I was born out of my mother, generations guided  
me ;  
My embryo has never been torpid—nothing could overlay  
it.

For it the nebula cohered to an orb,  
The long slow strata piled to rest it on,  
Vast vegetables gave it sustenance,  
Monstrous saurpids transported it in their mouths and de-  
posited it with care.

All forces have been steadily employ'd to complete and de-  
light me ;  
Now on this spot I stand with my robust Soul."

Not in vain have they pierced space as well as  
time and found "a vast similitude interlocking all."

"I open my scuttle at night and see the far-sprinkled sys-  
tems,  
And all I see, multiplied as high as I can cypher, edge but  
the rim of the farther systems.

Wider and wider they spread, expanding, always expand-  
ing,  
Outward, and outward, and for ever outward.

My sun has his sun, and round him obediently wheels,  
He joins with his partners a group of superior circuit,  
And greater sets follow, making specks of the greatest inside  
them.

There is no stoppage, and never can be stoppage ;  
If I, you, and the worlds, and all beneath or upon their sur-  
faces, were this moment reduced back to a pallid  
float, it would not avail in the long run ;  
We should surely bring up again where we now stand,  
And as surely go as much farther—and then farther and  
farther."

Not in vain for him have they penetrated into  
the substances of things to find that what we thought

poor, dead, inert matter is (in Clerk Maxwell's words), "a very sanctuary of minuteness and power where molecules obey the laws of their existence, and clash together in fierce collision, or grapple in yet more fierce embrace, building up in secret the forms of visible things;" each stock and stone a busy group of Ariels plying obediently their hidden tasks.

"Why! who makes much of a miracle?  
As to me, I know of nothing else but miracles,

To me every hour of the light and dark is a miracle,  
Every cubic inch of space is a miracle,  
Every square yard of the surface of the earth is spread with  
the same,  
Every spear of grass—the frames, limbs, organs, of men and  
women, and all that concerns them,  
All these to me are unspeakably perfect miracles."

The natural *is* the supernatural, says Carlyle. It is the message that comes to our time from all quarters alike; from poetry, from science, from the deep brooding of the student of human history. Science materialistic? Rather it is the current theology that is materialistic in comparison. Science may truly be said to have annihilated our gross and brutish conceptions of matter, and to have revealed it to us as subtle, spiritual, energetic beyond our powers of realization. It is for the Poet to increase the powers of realization. He it is who must awaken us to the perception of a new heaven and a new earth here where we stand on this old earth. He it is who must, in Walt Whitman's words, indicate the path between reality and the soul.

Above all is every thought and feeling in these

## Anne Gilchrist

poems touched by the light of the great revolutionary truth that man, unfolded through vast stretches of time out of lowly antecedents, is a rising, not a fallen creature; emerging slowly from purely animal life; as slowly as the strata are piled and the ocean beds hollowed; whole races still barely emerged, countless individuals in the foremost races barely emerged: "the wolf, the snake, the hog" yet lingering in the best; but new ideals achieved, and others come in sight, so that what once seemed fit is fit no longer, is adhered to uneasily and with shame; the conflicts and antagonisms between what we call good and evil, at once the sign and the means of emergence, and needing to account for them no supposed primeval disaster, no outside power thwarting and marring the Divine handiwork, the perfect fitness to its time and place of all that has proceeded from the Great Source. In a word that Evil is relative; is that which the slowly developing reason and conscience bid us leave behind. The prowess of the lion, the subtlety of the fox, are cruelty and duplicity in man.

"Silent and amazed, when a little boy,  
I remember I heard the preacher every Sunday put God in  
his statements,  
As contending against some being or influence,"

says the poet. And elsewhere, "Faith, very old now, scared away by science"—by the daylight science lets in upon our miserable inadequate, idolatrous conceptions of God and of His works, and on the sophistications, subterfuges, moral impossibilities, by which we have endeavored to reconcile the irreconcilable—the coexistence of omni-



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otent Goodness and an absolute Power of Evil,—  
“Faith must be brought back by the same power that caused her departure : restored with new sway, deeper, wider, higher than ever.” And what else, indeed, at bottom, is science so busy at? For what is Faith? “Faith,” to borrow venerable and unsurpassed words, “is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” And how obtain evidence of things not seen but by a knowledge of things seen? And how know what we may hope for, but by knowing the truth of what is, here and now? For seen and unseen are parts of the Great Whole : all the parts interdependent, closely related ; all alike have proceeded from and are manifestations of the Divine Source. Nature is not the barrier between us and the unseen, but the link, the communication ; she too has something behind appearances, has an unseen soul ; she too is made of “innumerable energies.” Knowledge is not faith, but it is faith’s indispensable preliminary and starting ground. Faith runs ahead to fetch glad tidings for us ; but if she start from a basis of ignorance and illusion, how can she but run in the wrong direction? “Suppose,” said that impetuous lover and seeker of truth, Clifford, “Suppose all moving things to be suddenly stopped at some instant, and that we could be brought fresh, without any previous knowledge, to look at the petrified scene. The spectacle would be immensely absurd. Crowds of people would be senselessly standing on one leg in the street looking at one another’s backs ; others would be wasting their time by sitting in a train in a place difficult to get at, nearly all with their mouths open, and their bodies

in some contorted, unrestful posture. Clocks would stand with their pendulums on one side. Everything would be disorderly, conflicting, in its wrong place. But once remember that the world is in motion, is going somewhere, and everything will be accounted for and found just as it should be. Just so great a change of view, just so complete an explanation is given to us when we recognize that the nature of man and beast and of all the world is *going somewhere*. The maladaptions in organic nature are seen to be steps toward the improvement or discarding of imperfect organs. The *baneful strife which lurketh inborn in us, and goeth on the way with us to hurt us*, is found to be the relic of a time of savage or even lower condition." "Going somewhere!" That is the meaning then of all our perplexities! That changes a mystery which stultified and contradicted the best we knew into a mystery which teaches, allures, elevates; which harmonizes what we know with what we hope. By it we begin to

" . . . . . see by the glad light,  
And breathe the sweet air of futurity."

The scornful laughter of Carlyle as he points with one hand to the baseness, ignorance, folly, cruelty around us, and with the other to the still unsurpassed poets, sages, heroes, saints of antiquity, whilst he utters the words "progress of the species!" touches us no longer when we have begun to realize "the amplitude of time;" when we know something of the scale by which Nature measures out the years to accomplish her smallest essential modification or development; know that to call a few

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thousands or tens of thousands of years antiquity,  
is to speak as a child, and that in her chronology  
the great days of Egypt and Syria, of Greece and  
Rome are affairs of yesterday.

“ Each of us inevitable ;  
Each of us limitless—each of us with his or her right upon  
the earth ;  
Each of us allow'd the eternal purports of the earth ;  
Each of us here as divinely as any are here.

You Hottentot with clicking palate ! You woolly hair'd  
hordes !  
You own'd persons, dropping sweat-drops or blood-drops !  
You human forms with the fathomless ever-impressive coun-  
tenances of brutes !  
I dare not refuse you—the scope of the world, and of time  
and space are upon me.

. . . . .  
I do not prefer others so very much before you either ;  
I do not say one word against you, away back there, where  
you stand ;  
(You will come forward in due time to my side.)

My spirit has pass'd in compassion and determination around  
the whole earth ;  
I have look'd for equals and lovers, and found them ready  
for me in all lands ;  
I think some divine rapport has equalized me with them.

O vapors ! I think I have risen with you, and moved away  
to distant continents and fallen down there, for rea-  
sons ;  
I think I have blown with you, O winds ;  
O waters, I have finger'd every shore with you.

I have run through what any river or strait of the globe has  
run through ;  
I have taken my stand on the bases of peninsulas, and on  
the high embedded rocks, to cry thence.

## Anne Gilchrist

### *Salut au monde !*

What cities the light or warmth penetrates, I penetrate those  
cities myself;  
All islands to which birds wing their way I wing my way  
myself.

Toward all,  
I raise high the perpendicular hand—I make the signal,  
To remain after me in sight forever,  
For all the haunts and homes of men."

But "Hold!" says the reader, especially if he be one who loves science, who loves to feel the firm ground under his feet, "That the species has a great future before it we may well believe; already we see the indications. But that the individual has is quite another matter. We can but balance probabilities here, and the probabilities are very heavy on the wrong side; the poets must throw in weighty matter indeed to turn the scale the other way!" Be it so: but ponder a moment what science herself has to say bearing on this theme; what are the widest, deepest facts she has reached down to. INDESTRUCTIBILITY: Amidst ceaseless change and seeming decay all the elements, all the forces (if indeed they be not one and the same) which operate and substantiate those changes, imperishable; neither matter nor force capable of annihilation. Endless transformations, disappearances, new combinations, but diminution of the total amount never; missing in one place or shape to be found in another, disguised ever so long, ready always to re-emerge. "A particle of oxygen," wrote Faraday, "is ever a particle of oxygen; nothing can in the least wear it. If it enters into combination and disappears as oxygen, if it pass through a thousand combinations, animal, vegetable, mineral,—if it lie



hid for a thousand years and then be evolved, it is oxygen with its first qualities neither more nor less." So then out of the universe is no door. CONTINUITY again is one of Nature's irrevocable words ; everything the result and outcome of what went before ; no gaps, no jumps ; always a connecting principle which carries forward the great scheme of things as a related whole, which subtly links past and present, like and unlike. Nothing breaks with its past. "It is not," says Helmholtz, "the definite mass of substance which now constitutes the body to which the continuance of the individual is attached. Just as the flame remains the same in appearance and continues to exist with the same form and structure although it draws every moment fresh combustible vapor and fresh oxygen from the air into the vortex of its ascending current ; and just as the wave goes on in unaltered form and is yet being reconstructed every moment from fresh particles of water, so is it also in the living being. For the material of the body like that of flame is subject to continuous and comparatively rapid change,—a change the more rapid the livelier the activity of the organs in question. Some constituents are renewed from day to day, some from month to month, and others only after years. That which continues to exist as a particular individual is, like the wave and the flame, only the *form of motion* which continually attracts fresh matter into its vortex and expels the old. The observer with a deaf ear recognizes the vibration of sound as long as it is visible and can be felt, bound up with other heavy matter. Are our senses in reference to life like the deaf ear in this respect ?"



## Anne Gilchrist

"You are not thrown to the winds—you gather certainly and safely around yourself ;

It is not to diffuse you that you were born of your mother and father—it is to identify you ;

It is not that you should be undecided, but that you should be decided ;

Something long preparing and formless is arrived and form'd in you,

You are henceforth secure, whatever comes or goes.

O Death ! the voyage of Death !

The beautiful touch of Death, soothing and benumbing a few moments for reasons ;

Myself discharging my excrementitious body to be burn'd or reduced to powder or buried.

My real body doubtless left me for other spheres,

My voided body, nothing more to me, returning to the purifications, farther offices, eternal uses of the earth."

Yes, they go their way, those dismissed atoms with all their energies and affinities unimpaired. But they are not all ; the will, the affections, the intellect are just as real as those affinities and energies, and there is strict account of all ; nothing slips through ; there is no door out of the universe. But they are qualities of a personality, of a self, not of an atom, but of what uses and dismisses those atoms. If the qualities are indestructible so must the self be. The little heap of ashes, the puff of gas, do you pretend that is all that was Shakespeare ? The rest of him lives in his works, you say ? But he lived and was just the same man after those were produced. The world gained, but he lost nothing of himself, rather grew and strengthened in the production of them.

Still farther, those faculties with which we seek for knowledge are only a part of us, there is some-

## *A Confession of Faith*

thing behind which wields them, something that those faculties cannot turn themselves in upon and comprehend ; for the part cannot compass the whole. Yet there it is with the irrefragable proof of consciousness. Who should be the mouthpiece of this whole ? Who but the poet, the man most fully "possessed of his own soul," the man of the largest consciousness ; fullest of love and sympathy which gather into his own life the experiences of others, fullest of imagination ; that quality whereof Wordsworth says that it

" . . . in truth  
Is but another name for absolute power,  
And clearest insight, amplitude of mind  
And reason in her most exalted mood."

Let Walt Whitman speak for us :—

" And I know I am solid and sound ;  
To me the converging objects of the universe perpetually  
flow :  
All are written to me, and I must get what the writing  
means.

I know I am deathless ;  
I know this orbit of mine cannot be swept by the carpenter's  
compass ;  
I know I shall not pass like a child's carlacue cut with a  
burnt stick at night.

I know I am august ;  
I do not trouble my spirit to vindicate itself or be under-  
stood ;  
I see that the elementary laws never apologize ;  
(I reckon I behave no prouder than the level I plant my  
house by, after all.)

I exist as I am—that is enough ;  
If no other in the world be aware I sit content ;  
And if each one and all be aware, I sit content.

## Anne Gilchrist

One world is aware, and by far the largest to me, and that is  
myself;  
And whether I come to my own to-day, or in ten thousand or  
ten million years,  
I can cheerfully take it now, or with equal cheerfulness I can  
wait.

My foothold is tenon'd and mortis'd in granite;  
I laugh at what you call dissolution;  
And I know the amplitude of time."

What lies through the portal of death is hidden  
from us; but the laws that govern that unknown  
land are not all hidden from us, for they govern  
here and now; they are immutable, eternal.

"Of and in all these things  
I have dream'd that we are not to be changed so much, nor  
the law of us changed,  
I have dream'd that heroes and good doers shall be under  
the present and past law,  
And that murderers, drunkards, liars, shall be under the  
present and past law,  
For I have dream'd that the law they are under now is  
enough."

And the law not to be eluded is the law of conse-  
quences, the law of silent teaching. That is the  
meaning of disease, pain, remorse. Slow to learn  
are we; but success is assured with limitless Benefi-  
cence as our teacher, with limitless time as our op-  
portunity. Already we begin—

"To know the Universe itself as a road—as many roads  
As roads for travelling souls.  
For ever alive; for ever forward.  
Stately, solemn, sad, withdrawn, baffled, mad, turbulent,  
feeble, dissatisfied;  
Desperate, proud, fond, sick;  
Accepted by men, rejected by men.

## *A Confession of Faith*

They go ! they go ! I know that they go, but I know not where they go.  
But I know they go toward the best, toward something great;  
The whole Universe indicates that it is good."

Going somewhere ! And if it is impossible for us to see whither, as in the nature of things it must be, how can we be adequate judges of the way ? how can we but often grope and be full of perplexity ? But we know that a smooth path, a paradise of a world, could only nurture fools, cowards, sluggards. "Joy is the great unfold," but pain is the great enlightener, the great stimulus in certain directions, alike of man and beast. How else could the self-preserving instincts, and all that grows out of them, have been evoked ? How else those wonders of the moral world, fortitude, patience, sympathy ? And if the lesson be too hard comes Death, come "the sure-enwinding arms of Death" to end it, and speed us to the unknown land.

" . . . . Man is only weak  
Through his mistrust and want of hope,"

wrote Wordsworth. But man's mistrust of himself is, at bottom, mistrust of the central Fount of power and goodness whence he has issued. Here comes one who plucks out of religion its heart of fear, and puts into it a heart of boundless faith and joy ; a faith that beggars previous faiths because it sees that All is good, not part bad and part good ; that there is no flaw in the scheme of things, no primeval disaster, no counteracting power ; but orderly and sure growth and development, and that

infinite Goodness and Wisdom embrace and ever lead forward all that exists. Are you troubled that He is an unknown God ; that we cannot by searching find Him out ? Why, it would be a poor prospect for the Universe if otherwise ; if, embryos that we are, we could compass Him in our thoughts :

“ I hear and behold God in every object, yet understand God not in the least.”

It is the double misfortune of the churches that they do not study God in his works—man and Nature and their relations to each other ; and that they do profess to set Him forth ; that they worship therefore a God of man’s devising, an idol made by men’s minds it is true, not by their hands, but none the less an idol. “ Leaves are not more shed out of trees than Bibles are shed out of you,” says the poet. They were the best of their time, but not of all time ; they need renewing as surely as there is such a thing as growth, as surely as knowledge nourishes and sustains to further development ; as surely as time unrolls new pages of the mighty scheme of existence. Nobly has George Sand, too, written “ Everything is divine, even matter ; everything is superhuman, even man. God is everywhere. He is in me in a measure proportioned to the little that I am. My present life separates me from Him just in the degree determined by the actual state of childhood of our race. Let me content myself in all my seeking to feel after Him, and to possess of Him as much as this imperfect soul can take in with the intellectual sense I have. The day will come when we shall no longer talk about God idly ; nay, when we shall



talk about Him as little as possible. We shall cease to set Him forth dogmatically, to dispute about His nature. We shall put compulsion on no one to pray to Him, we shall leave the whole business of worship within the sanctuary of each man's conscience. And this will happen when we are really religious."

In what sense may Walt Whitman be called the Poet of Democracy? It is as giving utterance to this profoundly religious faith in man. He is rather the prophet of what is to be than the celebrator of what is. "Democracy," he writes, "is a word the real gist of which still sleeps quite unwakened, notwithstanding the resonance and the many angry tempests out of which its syllables have come from pen or tongue. It is a great word, whose history, I suppose, remains unwritten because that history has yet to be enacted. It is in some sort younger brother of another great and often used word, Nature, whose history also waits unwritten." Political democracy, now taking shape, is the house to live in, and whilst what we demand of it is room for all, fair chances for all, none disregarded or left out as of no account, the main question, the kind of life that is to be led in that house is altogether beyond the ken of the statesmen as such, and is involved in those deepest facts of the nature and destiny of man which are the themes of Walt Whitman's writings. The practical outcome of that exalted and all-accepting faith in the scheme of things, and in man, toward whom all has led up and in whom all concentrates as the manifestation, the revelation of Divine Power is a changed estimate of himself; a higher reverence for, a loftier belief in

the heritage of himself; a perception that pride, not humility, is the true homage to his Maker; that "noblesse oblige" is for the Race, not for a handful; that it is mankind and womankind and their high destiny which constrain to greatness, which can no longer stoop to meanness and lies and base aims, but must needs clothe themselves in "the majesty of honest dealing" (majestic because demanding courage as good as the soldier's, self-denial as good as the saint's for every-day affairs), and walk erect and fearless, a law to themselves, sternest of all law-givers. Looking back to the palmy days of feudalism, especially as immortalized in Shakespeare's plays, what is it we find most admirable? what is it that fascinates? It is the noble pride, the lofty self-respect; the dignity, the courage, and audacity of its great personages. But this pride, this dignity rested half upon a true, half upon a hollow foundation; half upon intrinsic qualities, half upon the ignorance and brutishness of the great masses of the people, whose helpless submission and easily dazzled imaginations made stepping-stones to the elevation of the few, and "hedged round kings," with a specious kind of "divinity." But we have our faces turned towards a new day, and toward heights on which there is room for all.

"By God, I will accept nothing which all cannot have their counterpart of on the same terms"

is the motto of the great personages, the great souls of to-day. *On the same terms*, for that is Nature's law and cannot be abrogated, the reaping as you sow. But all shall have the chance to sow well. This is pride indeed! Not a pride that isolates, but

that can take no rest till our common humanity is lifted out of the mire everywhere, "a pride that cannot stretch too far because sympathy stretches with it :"—

"Whoever you are ! claim your own at any hazard !  
These shows of the east and west are tame, compared to  
you ;  
These immense meadows—these interminable rivers—  
You are immense and interminable as they ;  
These furies, elements, storms, motions of Nature, throes of  
apparent dissolution—you are he or she who is master  
or mistress over them,  
Master or mistress in your own right over Nature, elements,  
pain, passion, dissolution.

The hobbles fall from your ankles—you find an unfailing  
sufficiency ;  
Old or young, male or female, rude, low, rejected by the rest,  
whatever you are promulges itself ;  
Through birth, life, death, burial, the means are provided,  
nothing is scant ;  
Through angers, losses, ambition, ignorance and ennui,  
what you are picks its way."

This is indeed a pride that is "calming and excellent to the soul ;" that "dissolves poverty from its need and riches from its conceit."

And humility ? Is there, then, no place for that virtue so much praised by the haughty ? Humility is the sweet spontaneous grace of an aspiring, finely developed nature which sees always heights a-head still unclimbed, which outstrips itself in eager longing for excellence still unattained. Genuine humility takes good care of itself as men rise in the scale of being ; for every height climbed discloses still new heights beyond. Or it is a wise caution in fortune's favorites lest they themselves

should mistake, as the unthinking crowd around do, the glitter reflected back upon them by their surroundings for some superiority inherent in themselves. It befits them well if there be also due pride, pride of humanity behind. But to say to a man 'Be humble' is like saying to one who has a battle to fight, a race to run, 'You are a poor, feeble creature; you are not likely to win and you do not deserve to.' Say rather to him, 'Hold up your head! You were not made for failure, you were made for victory: go forward with a joyful confidence in that result sooner or later, and the sooner or later depends mainly on yourself.'

"What Christ appeared for in the moral-spiritual field for humankind, namely, that in respect to the absolute soul there is in the possession of such by each single individual something so transcendent, so incapable of gradations (like life) that to that extent it places all beings on a common level, utterly regardless of the distinctions of intellect, virtue, station, or any height or lowliness whatever" is the secret source of that deathless sentiment of Equality which how many able heads imagine themselves to have slain with ridicule and contempt, as Johnson, kicking a stone, imagined he had demolished Idealism when he had simply attributed to the word an impossible meaning. True, *Inequality* is one of Nature's words: she moves forward always by means of the exceptional. But the moment the move is accomplished, then all her efforts are towards equality, towards bringing up the rear to that standpoint. But social inequalities, class distinctions, do not stand for, or represent Nature's inequalities. Precisely the contrary in the long run.



## *A Confession of Faith*

They are devices for holding up many that would else gravitate down and keeping down many who would else rise up ; for providing that some should reap who have not sown, and many sow without reaping. But literature tallies the ways of Nature ; for though itself the product of the exceptional, its aim is to draw all men up to its own level. The great writer is "hungry for equals day and night," for so only can he be fully understood. "The meal is equally set ;" all are invited. Therefore is literature, whether consciously or not, the greatest of all forces on the side of Democracy:

Carlyle has said there is no grand poem in the world but is at bottom a biography—the life of a man. Walt Whitman's poems are not the biography of a man, but they are his actual presence. It is no vain boast when he exclaims,

"Camerado ! this is no book ;  
Who touches this touches a man."

He has infused himself into words in a way that had not before seemed possible ; and he causes each reader to feel that he himself or herself has an actual relationship to him, is a reality full of inexhaustible significance and interest to the poet. The power of his book, beyond even its great intellectual force, is the power with which he makes this felt ; his words lay more hold than the grasp of a hand, strike deeper than the gaze or the flash of an eye ; to those who comprehend him he stands "nigher than the nighest."

America has had the shaping of Walt Whitman, and he repays the filial debt, with a love that knows



## Anne Gilchrist

no stint. Her vast lands with their varied, brilliant climes and rich products, her political scheme, her achievements and her failures, all have contributed to make these poems what they are both directly and indirectly. Above all has that great conflict, the Secession War, found voice in him. And if the reader would understand the true causes and nature of that war, ostensibly waged between North and South, but underneath a tussle for supremacy between the good and the evil genius of America (for there were just as many secret sympathizers with the secession-slave-power in the North as in the South) he will find the clue in the pages of Walt Whitman. Rarely has he risen to a loftier height than in the poem which heralds that volcanic upheaval:—

“ Rise, O days, from your fathomless deeps, till you loftier  
and fiercer sweep !  
Long for my soul, hungering gymnastic, I devour'd what the  
earth gave me ;  
Long I roam'd the woods of the north—long I watch'd  
Niagara pouring ;  
I travel'd the prairies over, and slept on their breast—  
I cross'd the Nevadas, I cross'd the plateaus ;  
I ascended the towering rocks along the Pacific, I sail'd out  
to sea ;  
I sail'd through the storm, I was refresh'd by the storm ;  
I watch'd with joy the threatening maws of the waves ;  
I mark'd the white combs where they career'd so high, curl-  
ing over ;  
I heard the wind piping, I saw the black clouds ;  
Saw from below what arose and mounted, (O superb ! O  
wild as my heart, and powerful !)  
Heard the continuous thunder, as it bellow'd after the light-  
ning ;  
Noted the slender and jagged threads of lightning, as sud-  
den and fast amid the din they chased each other  
across the sky ;

## *A Confession of Faith*

—These, and such as these, I, elate, saw—saw with wonder,  
yet pensive and masterful ;

All the menacing might of the globe uprisen around me ;  
Yet there with my soul I fed—I fed content, supercilious.

'Twas well, O soul ! 'twas a good preparation you gave me !  
Now we advance our latent and ampler hunger to fill ;  
Now we go forth to receive what the earth and the sea never  
gave us ;

Not through the mighty woods we go, but through the  
mightier cities ;

Something for us is pouring now, more than Niagara pour-  
ing ;

Torrents of men (sources and rills of the Northwest, are you  
indeed inexhaustible ?)

What, to pavements and homesteads here—what were those  
storms of the mountains and sea ?

What, to passions I witness around me to-day ? Was the  
sea risen ?

Was the wind piping the pipe of death under the black  
clouds ?

Lo ! from deeps more unfathomable, something more deadly  
and savage ;

Manhattan, rising, advancing with menacing front—Cincin-  
nati, Chicago, unchain'd ;

—What was that swell I saw on the ocean ? behold what  
comes here !

How it climbs with daring feet and hands ! how it dashes !  
How the true thunder bellows after the lightning ! how bright  
the flashes of lightning !

How DEMOCRACY, with desperate, vengeful port strides on,  
shown through the dark by those flashes of light-  
ning !

(Yet a mournful wail and low sob I fancied I heard through  
the dark,

In a lull of the deafening confusion.)

Thunder on ! stride on, Democracy ! stride with vengeful  
stroke !

And do you rise higher than ever yet, O days, O cities !  
Crash heavier, heavier yet, O storms ! you have done me  
good ;

My soul, prepared in the mountains, absorbs your immortal  
strong nutriment,

## Anne Gilchrist

—Long had I walk'd my cities, my country roads, through  
farms, only half satisfied ;  
One doubt, nauseous, undulating like a snake, crawl'd on the  
ground before me,  
Continually preceding my steps, turning upon me oft, ironi-  
cally hissing low ;  
—The cities I loved so well, I abandon'd and left—I sped to  
the certainties suitable to me ;  
Hungering, hungering, hungering for primal energies, and  
nature's dauntlessness ;  
I refresh'd myself with it only, I could relish it only ;  
I waited the bursting forth of the pent fire—on the water and  
air I waited long ;  
—But now I no longer wait—I am fully satisfied—I am  
glutted ;  
I have witness'd the true lightning—I have witness'd my  
cities electric ;  
I have lived to behold man burst forth, and warlike America  
rise ;  
Hence I will seek no more the food of the northern solitary  
wilds,  
No more on the mountains roam, or sail the stormy sea."

But not for the poet a soldier's career. "To sit by the wounded and soothe them, or silently watch the dead" was the part he chose. During the whole war he remained with the army, but only to spend the days and nights, saddest, happiest of his life, in the hospital tents. It was a beautiful destiny for this lover of men, and a proud triumph for this believer in the People ; for it was the People that he beheld, tried by severest tests. He saw them "of their own choice, fighting, dying for their own idea, insolently attacked by the secession-slave-power." From the workshop, the farm, the store, the desk, they poured forth, officered by men who had to blunder into knowledge at the cost of the wholesale slaughter of their troops. He saw them "tried long and long by hopelessness, mismanage-

## *A Confession of Faith*

ment, defeat ; advancing unhesitatingly through incredible slaughter ; sinewy with unconquerable resolution. He saw them by tens of thousands in the hospitals tried by yet drearier, more fearful tests—the wound, the amputation, the shattered face, the slow hot fever, the long impatient anchorage in bed ; he marked their fortitude, decorum, their religious nature and sweet affection.” Finally, newest, most significant sight of all, victory achieved, the Cause, the Union safe, he saw them return back to “the workshop, the farm, the desk,” the store, instantly reabsorbed into the peaceful industries of the land :—

“A pause—the armies wait.

A million flush'd embattled conquerors wait.

The world, too, waits, then soft as breaking night and sure  
as dawn

They melt, they disappear.”

“Plentifully supplied, last-needed proof of Democracy in its personalities!” ratifying on the broadest scale Wordsworth's haughty claim for average man—“Such is the inherent dignity of human nature that there belong to it sublimities of virtue which all men may attain, and which no man can transcend.”

But, aware that peace and prosperity may be even still severer tests of national as of individual virtue and greatness of mind, Walt Whitman scans with anxious, questioning eye the America of to-day. He is no smooth-tongued prophet of easy greatness.

“I am he who walks the States with a barb'd tongue questioning every one I meet ;



## Anne Gilchrist

Who are you, that wanted only to be told what you knew before ?

Who are you, that wanted only a book to join you in your nonsense ?”

He sees clearly as any the incredible flippancy, the blind fury of parties, the lack of great leaders, the plentiful meanness and vulgarity ; the labor question beginning to open like a yawning gulf. . . .

“We sail a dangerous sea of seething currents, all so dark and untried. . . . It seems as if the Almighty had spread before this nation charts of imperial destinies, dazzling as the sun, yet with many a deep intestine difficulty, and human aggregate of cankerous imperfection, saying lo ! the roads ! The only plans of development, long and varied, with all terrible balks and ebullitions ! You said in your soul, I will be empire of empires, putting the history of old-world dynasties, conquests, behind me as of no account—making a new history, a history of democracy. . . . I alone inaugurating largeness, culminating time. If these, O lands of America, are indeed the prizes, the determinations of your soul, be it so. But behold the cost, and already specimens of the cost. Thought you greatness was to ripen for you like a pear ? If you would have greatness, know that you must conquer it through ages . . . must pay for it with proportionate price. For you, too, as for all lands, the struggle, the traitor, the wily person in office, scrofulous wealth, the surfeit of prosperity, the demonism of greed, the hell of passion, the decay of faith, the long postponement, the fossil-like lethargy, the ceaseless need of revolutions, prophets, thunderstorms, deaths, new projections and invigorations of ideas and men.”



"Yet I have dreamed, merged in that hidden-tangled problem of our fate, whose long unraveling stretches mysteriously through time—dreamed, portrayed, hinted already—a little or a larger band, a band of brave and true, unprecedented yet, arm'd and equipt at every point, the members separated, it may be by different dates and states, or south or north, or east or west, a year, a century here, and other centuries there, but always one, compact in soul, conscience-conserving, God-inculcating, inspired achievers not only in literature, the greatest art, but achievers in all art—a new undying order, dynasty from age to age transmitted, a band, a class at least as fit to cope with current years, our dangers, needs, as those who, for their time, so long, so well, in armor or in cowl, upheld and made illustrious that far-back-feudal, priestly world."

Of that band, is not Walt Whitman the pioneer? Of that New World literature, say, are not his poems the beginning? A rude beginning if you will. He claims no more and no less. But whatever else they may lack they do not lack vitality, initiative, sublimity. They do not lack that which makes life great and death, with its "transfers and promotions, its superb vistas," exhilarating,—a resplendent faith in God and man which will kindle anew the faith of the world:—

"Poets to come! Orators, singers, musicians to come!  
Not to-day is to justify me, and answer what I am for;  
But you, a new brood, native, athletic, continental, greater  
than before known,

Arouse! Arouse—for you must justify me—you must answer.

Anne Gilchrist

I myself but write one or two indicative words for the future,

I but advance a moment, only to wheel and hurry back in the darkness.

I am a man who, sauntering along, without fully stopping, turns a casual look upon you, and then averts his face,

Leaving it to you to prove and define it,  
Expecting the main things from you."

ANNE GILCHRIST.













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